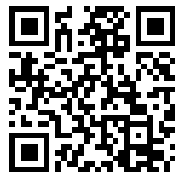


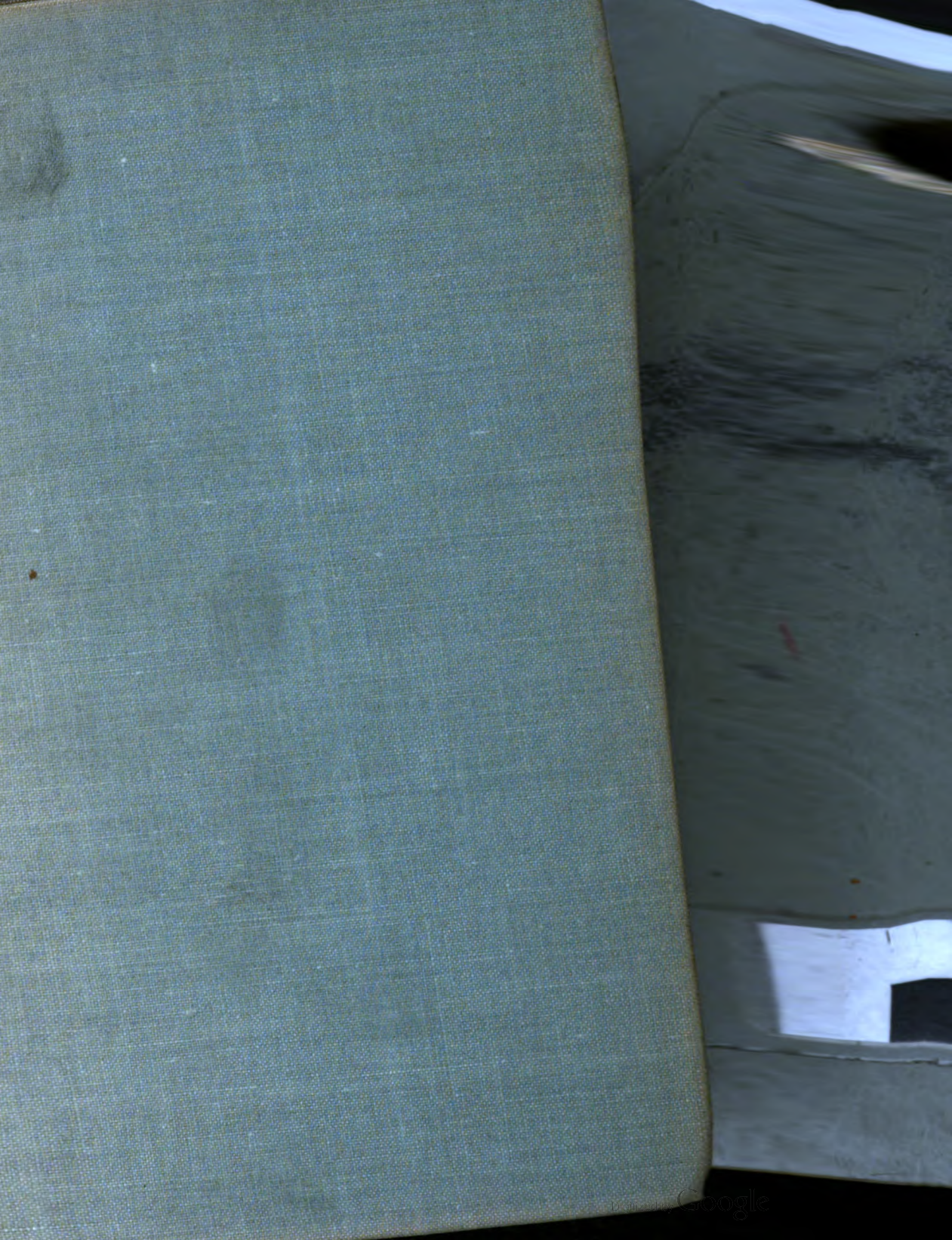
---

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google<sup>TM</sup> books

<https://books.google.com>







INDIANA  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

6/10

5/2/00





# THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

*By the same Author:—*

**THE MUTINY AT INVERGORDON**

Published September 1937

Reprinted November 1937







“Grey Diplomats” – battleships and battle cruisers in line ahead

# THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

*By*

KENNETH EDWARDS

(LT.-COMMANDER R.N., RETIRED)



LONDON

RICH & COWAN, LTD.  
37 BEDFORD SQUARE, W.C.1

EL

*First published, 1938*  
*Reprinted, April 1938*

738514

DA89  
.E26

INDIANA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

PRINTED AND BOUND BY THE CAMELOT PRESS LTD., LONDON AND SOUTHAMPTON  
FOR MESSRS. RICH AND COWAN, LTD., 37 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

65-9-8

To  
ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET  
SIR ROGER KEYES, Bt.  
G.C.B., K.C.V.O., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.L., LL.D., M.P.





## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
<b>I. CHANGE IN COMMAND</b> . . . . . Constantinople – the Yildiz fire – Sir John de Robeck's farewells – the end of an era.	13
<b>II. PUZZLE CRUISE</b> . . . . . Sir Osmond Brock takes over command of the Mediterranean – a cruise of puzzles – Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and Turkey – troublesome Greeks.	26
<b>III. END OF A CITY</b> . . . . . Kemal's great offensive – anxiety at Smyrna – refugees – massacre and fire.	40
<b>IV. WAR FEVER</b> . . . . . Diplomatic acrobatics – the Dardanelles neutral zones – trench-digging and reinforcements – war fever – the peace of Mudania.	54
<b>V. ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS</b> . . . . . Patrols and refugees – flight of a Sultan – fiddling at Lausanne – no leave for naval personnel – Smyrna alarm – mines and Bolshevik submarines – Lausanne again – evacuation of Constantinople.	67
<b>VI. ADRIATIC ALARM</b> . . . . . Redrawing the map of Europe – the Janina murders – Italy occupies Corfu – Mussolini's first brush with the League – Colossus of Rome – humiliation of Greece – the Malta language dispute.	81
<b>VII. RETROGRESSION</b> . . . . . Eight years of peace and retrogression – growing Italian jealousy – economy rules the fleet – the <i>Hood-Renown</i> collision – decline of morale – the <i>Royal Oak</i> scandal – visit to Constantinople leads to closer Turko-Soviet accord – London Naval Treaty.	92

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
VIII. REVOLT AND SCHISM . . . . .	107
The Cyprus revolt – bombs & battleships – the Greek monarchist revolt – Turkish shooting of British naval officers.	
IX. VOLTE-FACE . . . . .	118
Franco-Italian <i>rapprochement</i> – Mussolini “squares” France – the balance of power upset – Italy’s naval building – Italian war preparations – British precautions – Government blunders.	
X. PRELUDE TO WAR . . . . .	130
Mediterranean Fleet at home for Jubilee Review – hardening of British public opinion against Italy – the “Peace Ballot” – Mussolini’s plan against Britain – trying to stave off crisis – the story of the Black Box.	
XI. FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH . . . . .	145
State of Britain’s threatened fleet – plans for retaliation – how did England know Mussolini’s intentions? – British action not connected with Geneva – Mussolini forestalled – reinforcements for the Mediterranean – war conditions.	
XII. BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW . . . . .	158
Italian submarines off Malta – submarines off Alexandria – British unpreparedness – destroyers – minesweepers – lack of men – lack of stores – shortage of ammunition – “sealed lips” and a museum piece.	
XIII. BULWARKS OF PEACE . . . . .	171
Mediterranean defence dispositions – work of the Fleet Air Arm – fortifying mandated territory – footing the bill.	
XIV. SPIRIT AND WELFARE . . . . .	182
Censorship in England – hardship imposed on naval personnel – unfounded rumours of discontent – spirit of the fleet – Claridge’s Fleet Club at Alexandria.	
XV. SECOND CHALLENGE . . . . .	194
The October threat – Italian ship on fire in Alexandria harbour – effects of Britain’s naval concentration – demonstration of strength – end of sanctions against Italy.	

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XVI. PALESTINE . . . . .	206
Palestine troubles – patrols to stop gun-running – the Navy takes over the Haifa customs – anxiety over oil pipe line – bombs, ambushes, and fires.	
XVII. SHIPS OF THE LAND . . . . .	219
Making armoured lorries – Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred – the Navy takes over the railways – production of armoured trains – the “Jordan Queen” – military reinforcements arrive and take over.	
XVIII. PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN . . . . .	230
Outbreak of Spanish Civil War – protecting British interests – refugees – the Royal Navy organised for humanity.	
XIX. NAVAL PIMPERNELS . . . . .	242
Relations with Spanish authorities – smuggling of lives and jewels – meeting with Spanish republican navy – minefields in the north – exchanging hostages.	
XX. FREEDOM OF THE SEAS . . . . .	256
Working for the safety of shipping – irresponsible bombing – a battle cruiser goes to the assistance of a small steamer – a queer ultimatum – the Spanish contestants start to use sea power – British naval officers wounded by a Spanish shell – sinking of the <i>España</i> – a wild-geese chase – action of H.M.S. <i>Blanche</i> .	
XXI. DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS . . . . .	272
Intervention and non-intervention – the patrol scheme – “observers” – H.M.S. <i>Hunter</i> strikes a mine – evacuation of Basque children – bombing of the <i>Deutschland</i> – German reprisals – incident of the <i>Leipzig</i> – threat of European war.	
XXII. PIRATE SUBMARINES . . . . .	286
Abandonment of non-intervention patrols – appearance of pirate submarines – torpedo fired at H.M.S. <i>Havock</i> – counter-attacking action – who were the pirates?	



## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XXIII. CLEARING SHOWERS . . . . .	297
The Nyon Conference – anti-piracy patrol – cessation of submarine activities – the <i>Basilisk</i> incident – sinkings by aircraft and submarines – end of Biscay coast patrol.	
XXIV. THE OPEN ROAD . . . . .	312
The Mediterranean situation reviewed – can England hold it? – trade and Empire defence strategy – Italy's hostages.	
INDEX . . . . .	323

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Grey Diplomats" – battleships and battle cruisers in line ahead*		
	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
Looking up the Bosphorus from Seraglio Point*	<i>facing page</i>	30
Smyrna on fire . . . . .		52
Smyrna before the fire – H.M.S. <i>Iron Duke</i> in the bay . . . . .		52
Mudania – General Sir Charles Harington comes on board H.M.S. <i>Iron Duke</i> from Mudania Conference . . . . .		66
Escort for a new king – destroyers meeting the S.S. <i>Viceroy of India</i> with King Farouk, the new king of Egypt, on board, and turning up into station as escorts* . . . . .		84
The Royal Navy assembled for review in Spithead, with Fleet Air Arm machines flying overhead* . . . . .		130
Malta – H.M.S. <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> and other ships in the Grand Harbour – <i>dghaisas</i> in the foreground* . . . . .		158
Seaplane flying over Alexandria harbour during the 1935 crisis – "county" class cruisers in the foreground* . . . . .		174
Regatta – exercise and amusement with training – H.M.S. <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> in the background* . . . . .		194
Alexandria during the 1935 crisis – destroyers lying alongside large cruisers* . . . . .		204
The Key to the Mediterranean – "the Rock," with destroyers, a battleship, and a seaplane of the Fleet Air Arm* . . . . .		222
Spanish Civil War – a young refugee . . . . .		230
Spanish Civil War – "the sailor is a handyman" . . . . .		230
Spanish Civil War – refugees on board a British destroyer . . . . .		250
Spanish Civil War – naval boats embarking refugees . . . . .		250
"Thunder on the left" – a battle cruiser firing her 15 in. guns* . . . . .		260
"Taking it green" – a destroyer in dirty weather* . . . . .		276
"Up she goes" – H.M.S. <i>Courageous</i> lifts to big sea – taking a lot of it with her* . . . . .		300
Map I. . . . .	<i>facing page</i>	46
Map II. . . . .		84
Map III. . . . .		138
Map IV. . . . .		242

\* Photos supplied by Charles E. Brown

**"A fleet of British ships of war are the  
best negotiators in Europe."**

**NELSON, 1801**

## CHAPTER I

### CHANGE IN COMMAND

Constantinople – the Yildiz fire – Sir John de Robeck's farewells – the end of an era

IF YOU STAND FOR AN HOUR on the Galata Bridge, which spans the Golden Horn at Constantinople, you will hear every language under the sun.

That may be a slight exaggeration; but if you had idled there during the four years immediately following the Armistice you would have had to admit that Babel was well served. More, you would have seen costumes and uniforms credible and incredible and of a truly wonderful diversity.

Constantinople, which had changed rulers so often in history, was experiencing the most complicated administration of all – “inter-Allied control.” The city was also a clearing-house for all the flotsam and jetsam of a great war which had, in the Near East, resolved itself into a network of little wars and rival allegiances; which in turn had thrown up new states and undreamt-of nationalisms, each one of them vociferous in proclaiming their newly discovered “self-determination.”

The last stand of the White Russians in the Crimea, under General Denikin and General Wrangel, had collapsed. The new Black Sea country of Georgia had ended its brief but hectic life by being engulfed by Soviet Russia. Mustapha Kemal, who had been sent to Asia Minor by the shadowy authority of the Sultan to ensure the compliance of the Northern Zone Turkish Army with the terms of the Armistice, had become the



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

leader of a new movement based upon the prevalent doctrine of extreme nationalism.

In forming a Turkish Nationalist Party, Kemal had been unwittingly assisted by the action of the badly informed politicians at Versailles in allocating Smyrna and a portion of Asia Minor to Greece. This action, of course, gave a tremendous fillip to the patriotic self-determination which was epidemic all over the Near East, and which was being exploited by Kemal.

The new war which arose from the efforts of the Turkish Nationalists to drive the Greeks out of Asia Minor presented a crop of pretty problems. Official peace with Turkey had not then been signed. Most of the Allies were therefore still technically at war with that somewhat nebulous portion of Turkish authority represented by the Sultan. Yet there could be no question of supporting Kemal. The politicians of the Allies, led by Mr. Lloyd George, had put the Greeks into Asia Minor, and were therefore morally concerned with supporting them against the Turkish Nationalists. The Greeks, moreover, were playing their part in the inter-Allied administration of Constantinople. Their warships lay in the Bosphorus, flaunting their blue and white ensigns, and with their officers in a perpetual panic lest some Turkish Nationalist should contrive to blow them up at their moorings.

These problems, however, did not unduly worry an Inter-Allied Commission and a collection of naval and military officers who had in the past three years become inured to incredible situations in this international mad-house.

At the beginning of 1922 many of the troubles seemed to be solving themselves. The Treaty of Sèvres, concluding peace with Turkey, as represented by the Sultan, had been signed. The High Commissioners of Great Britain, France, and Italy had succeeded in creating neutral zones in Anatolia and the Gallipoli Peninsula to

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

keep the Dardanelles outside the ring in which struggled the Greeks and Turkish Nationalists. This struggle, moreover, seemed to be nearing stalemate. Kemal had suffered a series of defeats and had retreated far into the mountains of the interior. In Constantinople the flood of Russian refugees was gradually ebbing away, and relations between conquerors and conquered were cordial. The achievement of this state of affairs had been helped in no small degree by the Americans, who had never been at war with Turkey and were now busily consolidating their peaceful position with an eye to concessions and trading advantages.

It looked as if the task of the Royal Navy, upon which had fallen a heavy burden of police duty, the evacuation of refugees, the support of lost causes, and endless diplomatic missions, was ended. Admiral Sir John de Robeck, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, who had for some time doubled this duty with that of British High Commissioner at Constantinople, was to be relieved.

Sir John had been to Malta in his flagship, H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. He returned to Constantinople for his farewell visit, arriving at the fleet anchorage in the Bosphorus on April 5th, 1922. Immediately Constantinople set itself to live up to its reputation of never being dull.

Early that afternoon a large fire broke out at Yildiz, a northerly district of Constantinople consisting almost entirely of wooden houses tumbling over one another on the steep hillsides. At the northern end of this district the houses gave place to an open space, on the edge of which stood one of the Sultan's numerous summer palaces. This was a wooden structure in the worst Near East manner; a mass of fretworked balconies and spiky ornamentation.

The fire started somewhere in the lower part of Yildiz, but in that tinder-box, and helped by a strong breeze, it was impossible to say exactly where any fire began. The

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

whole district was ablaze in a few minutes. The Summer Palace was threatened, and it seemed that only the open space to leeward, beyond the palace, could stop the roaring flames.

Nevertheless, the Allied forces and the local fire brigades flung themselves into the fray. Men, fire-engines, and demolition parties were landed from the ships in the Bosphorus to help the soldiers and the civil authorities.

The Constantinople fire brigades of those days were more fitted for musical comedy than for serious fire-fighting. The engines were of the hand-worked "push and pull" variety similar to those which were carried in our ships. They were slung on poles and carried on the shoulders of some of the "brigade," while others went ahead, astern, and on both sides. The men of the "brigade" wore scarlet shirts like football jerseys, tight white breeches reaching just below the knee, and a tight-fitting skull-cap of coloured cloth.

The whole outfit dashed through the streets at the "double," uttering loud and unearthly cries of warning. It looked as if a rugby football team of the 1870's had stepped out of a yellowing group photograph and was bringing home in triumph some extraordinary trophy of the field.

The fire produced something which had been sadly lacking among the Allied forces in control of Constantinople — co-operation in face of a common enemy. Nevertheless, even in the hot blast of the fire which filled the narrow streets, petty jealousies were much in evidence. Particularly was this the case over the Summer Palace. This was close to the barracks in which the Italian troops were housed. The Italians came tumbling out of their quarters, determined to save the Summer Palace and its inmates from destruction. The interior of the palace was, of course, legendary. That there were likely to be rich pickings and exciting experiences had, however, occurred

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

to others also. Authority knew that the Summer Palace was empty. Not so the rank and file of the international fire-fighters. British sailors were convinced that it housed a harem of lightly clad females of incredible beauty. Here was opportunity for knight errantry too good to be missed. The prospect of gallantry was, of course, irresistible to Frenchmen and Italians.

Thus it was an exceedingly representative collection of Allied forces which broke into the compound of the Summer Palace.

There was some disappointment when it was found that the palace was nothing but an empty and highly inflammable shell.

The majority, however, quickly settled down to the task of giving the wooden palace a thorough wetting. The only water-supply was a round pond in the middle of the overgrown compound. A "push and pull" fire-engine arrived, hoses were connected, and, in spite of all difficulties of language, a goodly jet of water was soon wetting the dry wooden ornamentation of the palace.

But not for long. The pond, which had probably served in its palmy days as a home for rare and vivid fish, was now inhabited by a colony of large frogs. No sooner did the water level in the pond begin to drop below the water-lily leaves than the frogs retreated in panic to the bottom, where they were sucked against the end of the suction hose of the fire-engine. The steady jet of water playing on the palace lost its steadiness. It faltered, spat viciously, and died. Investigation showed a large frog spread-eagled against the grating on the end of the suction hose.

This happened three or four times in quick succession, while the wind brought burning brands and showered them on and about the palace. Strong measures had to be taken with the frogs. The Sultan's garden witnessed the astonishing sight of men of several nationalities

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

wading about in the pond hunting frogs away from the suction of the fire-engine.

The pond emptied rapidly and it very soon became obvious that, if the fire continued to rage towards the palace, the water-supply could not hope to compete.

It was then that the magazine came into prominence. This was a curious circular building on the edge of the "common." Between the magazine and the side of the palace compound ran a fairly wide road, but down the side of the compound ran long, low outbuildings, all made of wood. If the palace caught, the fire would immediately spread along these buildings and come perilously close to the magazine, which housed large quantities of heterogeneous explosives. Already, on the roof of the magazine, there were four or five British sailors, busily engaged in putting out burning brands carried on to it by the wind. Water was practically non-existent in the vicinity of the magazine, so that it would have to be abandoned if the fire spread closer to it along the Sultan's outbuildings.

The magazine and its contents had originally been Turkish, but, under the terms of the Armistice, had become a very embarrassing possession of the Inter-Allied Commission of Control. It would have been better blown up, except that inter-Allied jealousies forbade this, while the explosion would probably have wrecked a large part of the city.

It was decreed that these outbuildings should be demolished before the fire could reach them. They were flimsy affairs. The Sultan must at one time have had a passion for poultry or for eggs, for they had obviously been built and used as hen-houses and would have housed many hundreds of birds.

The orders came as a boon to a demolition party of British seamen, who, armed with tins of gun-cotton and fuses, were longing to "have a go."

They did "have a go." They dug a hole in the earth

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

floor of one of the outhouses and bedded down enough gun-cotton to pulverise the whole length of the hen-houses. There was a frenzied search for something with which to "tamp down" the explosive, and two burly seamen were seen staggering under the weight of a large blacksmith's anvil. A few minutes later everybody ran for their lives.

There was a moment of agonising suspense. Then a muffled explosion was followed by a whining drone. Down the road beyond the magazine an immaculate Italian officer threw himself into the muddy ditch at the roadside as the anvil buried itself in the ground a few yards away.

As for the Sultan's hen-houses, they remained standing and unharmed except for the large rent in the roof made by the passage of the anvil. They did not remain so for long, however. The British seamen, having "had their go" with gun-cotton, fell back upon their own brawn, which proved a far more effective method of demolishing such rickety structures.

At the same time providence took a hand in the fire-fighting. The wind shifted and dropped. Robbed of this driving-force, the fire was soon confined. The magazine remained intact – to prove a bone of contention whenever the question of ownership was raised in the inter-Allied councils.

Grimy, but exceedingly pleased with themselves, the naval fire-parties returned to the ships. On board was held the inevitable but awkward stocktaking. Distracted storekeeping officers found that a great deal of the "gear" which the fire-fighters had taken ashore had not returned. Next day search-parties were sent out in quest of missing hoses, branch pipes, and so forth. They returned empty-handed. The missing items were nowhere to be found, and it was decided, probably wisely, that diplomatic relations would be better served by allowing the pockets of the British taxpayer to suffer rather than by inquiring too closely into the whereabouts of a few naval stores.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The great fire of Yildiz was followed by a few days of peace. There was much to be done. Admiral Sir John de Robeck had many farewells to make, and, as is always the case in an international community, the laws, both written and unwritten, of precedence, diplomatic usage, and politeness had to be obeyed with a weather eye always lifting upon national interests. Many official calls were paid and returned. Many dinner-parties were held both ashore and on board that grand old ship *H.M.S. Iron Duke*, which had served Lord Jellicoe so faithfully as flagship of the Grand Fleet.

The saluting guns got hot with their explosive compliments. Staff officers got hot in trying to differentiate between important information and cunningly contrived propaganda. The officers and men of the fleet were continually getting hot with the burden of unaccustomed accoutrements. Apart from the war between the Greeks and the Turkish Nationalists, which formed a background of wind and drums to the sensitive strings of Constantinople, the Near East seemed to be basking in unaccustomed peace.

Perhaps it was a question of habit dying hard; perhaps the naval authorities were endowed with prophetic wisdom and distrusted calm in an area so long swept by storms. Twice every week the ships' companies of all the British men-of-war donned gaiters and webbing equipment. Sometimes they even indulged in gas masks and tin hats. Always they brandished rifles and bayonets in emulation of their brethren of the Army. They did so with great success, although awnings were apt to suffer from the prods of bayonets. In those days in the Near East the British sailor lived right up to the motto of "Ready, aye, ready" — no matter what eventuality might occur. It goes without saying that the Mediterranean Fleet of that time could boast of a most contented personnel.

It was on the afternoon of Good Friday, April 14th,

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

1922, that Sir John de Robeck said good-bye to Constantinople, and to one of the most beautiful sights in the world – the domes and minarets of San Sophia and the great mosque of Sultan Ahmed surmounting the mist hanging over the Golden Horn.

His feelings at leaving must have been very mixed. Never before or since has an English admiral carried such a weight of diplomatic responsibility as had Sir John at Constantinople. He had carried it, not only with success, but in a manner which had endeared him to all the nationalities with which he had had to deal. Yet fate had decreed that, in major operations in that part of the world, his part had to be played upon losing sides.

He had commanded during the war, and had been forced to turn the failure of the Gallipoli campaign into an evacuation which will live for all time as the perfect example of the strategy and tactics of retreat. Later he had been forced to risk ships and men in support of the last stands of the White Russians in and around the Crimea. He had been forced by the caprice of far-away politicians to bolster up cause after cause which was already lost, or as good as lost. Lack of realism was for ever being thrust upon him, yet he himself had preserved a clear-sighted realism which saved British prestige from extinction in the quaking bog of international intrigue. Above all, he had earned the respect and affection – love is hardly too strong a word – of all those who served under him.

Seldom, during those anxious years in command, could Sir John have been certain of the full support of the politicians at home or at Versailles. Yet always he made it clear to those who worked under him that he would “back them up.” He therefore achieved respect and affection, and was served with great willingness and initiative. The captain of a destroyer who served under him during the worst of the Black Sea complications has said: “We realised that Sir John . . . placed a confidence



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in those under him which inspired commanding officers to act as seemed best to them, secure in the knowledge that a very human and understanding Commander-in-Chief and staff would support the 'trier.' It was a most admirable training for those fortunate enough to obtain it." Not a few naval officers deplore that such training and encouragement of initiative were sacrificed on the altar of economy during the period when disarmament and the theory of collective security held sway.

Apart from Constantinople, Malta was the scene of the most important farewells of Sir John de Robeck before he gave up command of the Mediterranean. Diplomatic commitments, however, made it necessary for the departing Commander-in-Chief to pay many other farewell visits – as it later made it necessary for the new Commander-in-Chief to steam round the Eastern Mediterranean making acquaintances.

H.M.S. *Iron Duke* stopped for a few hours off Chanak, in the Dardanelles. Then she steamed on to Mitylene, where both civil and military governors of the Greek regime had to be received with due ceremony and speeded on their departure by a salute of seventeen guns.

From Mitylene the flagship steamed on to Smyrna. On entering that harbour the flag of the Commander-in-Chief was saluted by the Greek battleship *Lemnos*. Little did anybody on board either ship think at that time that only a few months later the guns of the Greek battleship would be firing in anger – and in so doing causing embarrassment to H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, although the latter was by no means their target.

As a final gesture of goodwill the Royal Marine band of the British flagship landed and played at the Smyrna Race Club, where a special meeting was held in honour of the visit of the British Admiral.

Limassol, Haifa, Port Said, and Alexandria were visited in quick succession before the arrival at Malta on April 28th. Twelve days were spent at Malta. They

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

were very full days for the Commander-in-Chief. Malta was, and still is, the nerve centre of the staff system in the Mediterranean, and Sir John de Robeck had to see that all was in perfect order for the arrival of his successor.

The last act performed by Sir John before leaving the headquarters of the Mediterranean Fleet was to supervise the race for the *dghaisas* – the high stemmed and sterned native boats which ply in the harbours of Malta, propelled either by one man standing and sculling two oars or by one man sitting and one standing.

The *dghaisa* men of Malta are almost entirely dependent for their livelihood upon the presence of the fleet, for in Malta they do nearly all the coming and going and so take a great deal of work off the ships' boats. If the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet are away from Malta for prolonged periods owing to "special circumstances" in one part of the station, the *dghaisa* men of Malta come near to starvation. They are then apt to have a disturbing influence upon the complex politics of the island. It is therefore a wise and diplomatic Commander-in-Chief who provides them with a special *festa* on such occasions. Sir John arranged the race from the breakwater to the quarterdeck of his flagship, and he personally presented prizes to the winners.

An hour later H.M.S. *Iron Duke* left the Grand Harbour. The harbour echoed to the reports of saluting guns. The high Barracca Gardens were black with people. All ships were manned and cheered as the flagship left. *Dghaisas* strove for a while to keep pace with the battleship. Then the escorting duties were taken up by picket-boats, who followed far beyond the breakwaters. Finally, in the gathering dusk, the ship passed a collection of whalers near the red buoy well outside the harbour. These were from the destroyers in Marsamuschetto Harbour, and they said farewell with cheers and the firing of Very lights.

Three days later H.M.S. *Iron Duke* dropped anchor

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

off the Vieux Port at Marseilles. At eleven o'clock that morning, May 15th, Admiral Sir Osmond de B. Brock, the new Commander-in-Chief, came on board. Two and a half hours later Sir John de Robeck left his flagship. He was given every honour of which his officers and men were capable. He was pulled ashore by the wardroom officers in the pinnace – the second largest pulling boat in the ship. As escort the pinnace had a cutter on each bow, one manned by the gunroom officers and the other by the warrant officers.

When he went over the side of H.M.S. *Iron Duke* the ship's company cheered themselves hoarse. As he set foot on land the officers did likewise, to the astonishment and consternation of many folk of Marseilles. This was not the polite and stereotyped ceremony, the observance of which had played so large a part in Sir John's dealings with friends and foes and neutrals during the period of his Mediterranean command. It was a spontaneous show of feeling on the part of men normally reserved and silent. Never was there paid so generous and genuine a compliment.

The change in Commander-in-Chief marked, in the Mediterranean, the end of one era and the beginning of another. War and the troubles of peace-making had come to an end, and the man who had commanded in the Mediterranean both in war and during the turbulence of peace-making had left for home. A new Commander-in-Chief had arrived. It was he who would have to struggle with the problems which too idealistic peace-making were to bring in its train.

More than fifteen years have passed since Sir Osmond Brock relieved Sir John de Robeck as Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean. In those years the Mediterranean has changed almost beyond belief. Old and once weak nations have been resurrected by dictators and given great strength. As a right-of-way for the trade of the world it is of vital importance to the British Empire.

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

Increasing dependence upon oil and the completion of the pipe line from the Iraq oil-fields to the Mediterranean coast have added to its importance as a maritime highway. Yet the domination of the inland sea and its conversion from an international right-of-way to a *mare nostrum* has become a matter almost of religion to one Great Power.

To-day there is at the eastern end of the Mediterranean guerilla warfare between races. At the western end there is raging war of political ideologies which threatens always to become a "free for all." To the north lies the constantly fluctuating diplomacy of a troubled Europe. A French War Minister has recently prophesied that the next great war will be fought in North Africa. To the south-east lies a new nation, seemingly very subject to internal complaints, which dominates the route to the East. The ability of the British Empire to hold its possessions in the Mediterranean or to safeguard the right-of-way through that sea is constantly being questioned and discussed. Yet when Sir John de Robeck was Commander-in-Chief, Britain dominated the Mediterranean without question.

These great changes have not appeared suddenly, like a volcanic island thrown up from the bed of the sea. They have evolved gradually, often from policies framed far away from the inland sea. And over every circumstance, great and small, has watched the British Navy, playing its part in each one of the dramas which have been building the future.

## CHAPTER II

### PUZZLE CRUISE

Sir Osmond Brock takes over command of the Mediterranean – a cruise of puzzles – Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and Turkey – troublesome Greeks

THE POST OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of the Mediterranean Station is rightly regarded as one of the best plums of naval high command.

Admiral Sir Osmond Brock had good reason to be pleased at hoisting his flag in H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. During the last two years of the Great War he had been Chief-of-the-Staff to Admiral Sir David Beatty, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet. When the Grand Fleet had been demobilised, he had been posted to the Admiralty as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff. As such he had for three years been involved in the most difficult of all tasks – that of post-war naval retrenchment. The war was over. It had been a war to end war. The Royal Navy had become an anachronism, and a very expensive one at that. Such were the views with which he had had to contend. The claims for economy and yet more economy could not be denied. To meet them and at the same time to prevent them from going too far, and imposing undue hardship upon a personnel which had served faithfully, had been a task of herculean proportions.

The Admiralty during those years, moreover, had been dealing with a political situation as complicated as it was seemingly incomprehensible. While demands for retrenchment and economy were being pressed, the Admiralty had been forced by the Government to

## PUZZLE CRUISE

prosecute unofficial and extremely unpopular warfare in the Baltic, the Black Sea, and elsewhere. These operations had led to discontent among the naval personnel which had reached grave proportions and manifested itself on more than one occasion in open mutiny.

There are few naval officers who do not heave a sigh of relief when they are able to say good-bye to the whispering-galleries of the Admiralty corridors, where they are nearly always at the mercy of the permanent civil officials, and go back to sea.

As a sea-going Commander-in-Chief, however, Admiral Sir Osmond Brock was to experience even greater difficulties. Both in the Grand Fleet and at the Admiralty he had been concerned almost entirely with the domestic problems of the Navy at one of the most difficult periods in its history. Certainly there had been many comings and goings, manœuvrings and counter-moves, during those three years at the Admiralty. But these had all been domestic, in that they were concerned with the politicians of Great Britain. There had, before Sir Osmond left the Admiralty, been overtures on the subject of naval disarmament by international agreement, but these had been comparatively plain sailing. Diplomacy has a fairly easy time when all parties desire the same goal. Sir Osmond Brock had been prevented by illness from going to Washington.

The new Commander-in-Chief was faced with an exceedingly difficult task in following Sir John de Robeck. He had no first-hand knowledge of the complexities of the situation in the Near East or of the men who operated the struggling puppets in that area. The British naval commander in the Mediterranean, however, had ceased to be the sole representative of the British Government at Constantinople. Sir Horace Rumbold had been High Commissioner and Ambassador for more than eighteen months.

Events proved kind to Sir Osmond Brock. No sudden

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

crisis arose for two months after he hoisted his flag, and the new Admiral made the most of this opportunity to get to know his command and the men with whom he would have to work. It very soon became clear that the new Commander-in-Chief was a force to be reckoned with – a first-class brain spurred by an unwavering determination to master all the manifold problems of his domain. During the three years of his command of the Mediterranean, problems crowded upon him, and the British Empire was brought to the verge of another war. War was averted and problems solved to a large extent by the hard work and the genius for co-operation of Sir Osmond Brock. It was no accident that, when he left the Mediterranean in 1925, it was a peaceful sea in which King George V and Queen Mary cruised.

H.M.S. *Iron Duke* went from Marseilles to Malta, where the flagship stayed three weeks before taking the new Commander-in-Chief to visit other parts of his command. There was early evidence that Sir Osmond was fully aware of the possibility of trouble flaring up over one or other of the bones of contention in the Near East, and that he did not propose to be caught napping. While at Malta, as many of the officers and men of the flagship as possible underwent musketry courses at the Ricasoli rifle range. Moreover, most of the common shell which was carried was disembarked, and the shell-rooms were filled with more damaging projectiles filled with lyddite and trotyl. There was little enough on the surface to warrant such a change at that time, but it was a wise precaution. Had it not been carried out when the opportunity offered, the lack of high explosive shell might well have proved a serious embarrassment later in the year.

The shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, which Sir Osmond Brock visited on his first cruise in his new command, were bristling with problems and contentions. Practically all of these were the direct result of the Great

## PUZZLE CRUISE

War. War had proved a forcing-house for nationalism throughout the Near East; the end of the war had led to the establishment of new nations and new constitutions; in peace these were subject to all manner of growing-pains.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to lose itself in the mazy intricacies of foreign and international politics, but to show how the problems of the Mediterranean affected the Royal Navy, and how British policies were carried out by the naval personnel. The problems facing the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean are important, since, in many cases, they dictated his actions and those of his successors. It is necessary, therefore, that the outlines of these problems and their causes should be set out. To this end we will follow Sir Osmond Brock upon his initial cruise in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, giving briefly the situation as he found it in each country visited.

From Malta H.M.S. *Iron Duke* went to Alexandria.

Egypt was at that time just beginning to feel her feet under a new regime. When Turkey entered the Great War on the side of the Central Powers, Egypt became a British Protectorate. This was effected by the simple means of declaration of the fact by the British Government, over the signature of "His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs." This ended the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire over Egypt. A parallel proclamation deposed the Khedive, Abbas II, who was in Constantinople, and set up Prince Hussein Kemal with the title of Sultan of Egypt.

The end of the Great War brought to Egypt the prevailing doctrines of extreme nationalism and a desire for immediate independence. The new patriots rallied first under Zaghlul. Up and down the country there were riots and anti-British demonstrations. It was well for Great Britain that in those troublous years they had such a man as Lord Allenby at the Residency in Cairo.



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

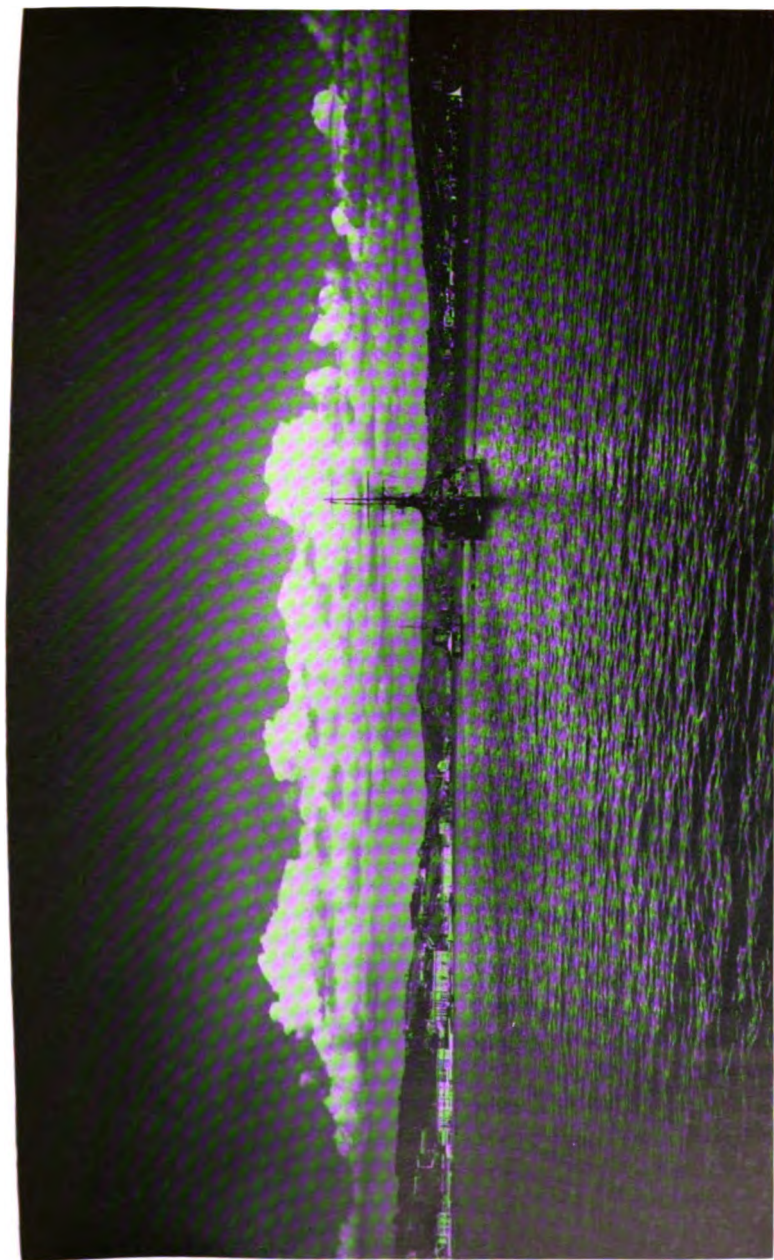
Finally it became clear that the British position in Egypt was likely to be lost altogether unless definite promises of ultimate independence were given. Accordingly, on February 28th, 1922 – three and a half months before Sir Osmond Brock's visit to Alexandria – the British Government declared that the British Protectorate over Egypt was terminated, and Egypt became an independent Sovereign State. Naturally the independence of the new Sovereign State was subject to many important reservations, which were subsequently investigated and formed the basis of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1937.

On the granting of sovereignty to Egypt, the Sultan, Ahmed Fuad, became King Fuad. The full constitution of the new country was not, however, proclaimed until a year later.

Egypt in the early summer of 1922 was, therefore, in a transition stage. There was considerable fear – afterwards fully justified – that the new-found independence would go to the heads of the extreme nationalists and lead to agitation and demonstration against the reservations made by Great Britain. With any and all such possibilities Sir Osmond Brock had to make himself familiar, for, like every British naval commander in the Mediterranean, his first and most vital pre-occupation had to be the safety of the trade route to the East through the Suez Canal.

From Alexandria the new Commander-in-Chief went to Port Said, and then on to Palestine, where other, and totally different, problems awaited him.

H.M.S. *Iron Duke* anchored off Jaffa early in the morning of May 23rd. Jaffa is a thoroughly unpleasant anchorage. There is nearly always a swell, and the ship is off a lee shore. Boat work, also, is dangerous. Just off the so-called harbour, which will accommodate nothing larger than a few of the native sailing-craft, is an ugly reef, the top fangs of which are just awash. The reef is between the roadstead and the landing-places, and it is



Looking up the Bosphorus from Seraglio Point, 1922



## PUZZLE CRUISE

by no means easy to see, the ends of it being marked by nothing more obvious than the local knowledge of the watermen of the port.

The neighbourhood of the port is also exceedingly dangerous to bathers. The day after the arrival of H.M.S. *Iron Duke* at Jaffa, one of her signalmen was drowned while bathing from the shore. In spite of a prolonged search, his body was never recovered. Later the same day the ship received a call for help because three natives were drowning close to the shore. Boats were sent in and searched for two hours, but the undertow had claimed them also.

While H.M.S. *Iron Duke* lay at Jaffa Sir Osmond Brock, having received and returned calls from the local civil and military authorities, went to Jerusalem. There he learned from Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner – in the Government House on the top of the Mount of Olives which had been built to the order of Kaiser Wilhelm II as a link in his dream-chain of official residences from Europe to Bagdad – of the problems of Palestine.

Palestine, being backed by desert, can be likened to a comparatively narrow land "bridge" between Anatolia and Egypt. For this reason alone it is of importance, for across this bridge might pass a threat to the Suez Canal conceived far to the north in Asia Minor. Since the beginning of 1935 Palestine has increased in importance, both from the naval and the economic points of view, owing to the completion of the oil pipe line from the oil-fields of Iraq to the Mediterranean seaboard at Haifa. Oil is the life-blood of the British Navy, and even so long ago as 1922 the representative of the British Admiralty was fully aware of the importance of Palestine in view of the pipe-line scheme which had been mooted.

The end of the Great War had put an end to Turkish rule in Palestine, and in April 1920 the Supreme Council of the Allies had awarded the mandate of Palestine to

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Great Britain. This mandate was confirmed by the Council of the League of Nations two years later, and it actually came into force at the end of September 1923.

Thus, at the time of the visit of Sir Osmond Brock, Palestine was under government by unconfirmed mandate, then an experimental form of administration. In the case of Palestine, the experiment was complicated by the rival claims of the Arab and the Jewish communities. These had been spurred on by the McMahon letter on the one hand, which had promised Palestine to the Arabs, and by the Balfour declaration on the other hand, which had promised Palestine as a national home to the Jews.

As High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel held the delicate balance between these two opposites. He had been assisted by a mixed Advisory Council, but at the time of Sir Osmond Brock's visit he was endeavouring to secure the acceptance of all parties to a constitution. This was strongly resented by the Arabs, who saw in it an attempt to put the Balfour declaration into effect and turn Palestine into a Jewish State.

In 1922 Palestine was comparatively peaceful. There was none of the large-scale terrorism which has characterised its history in recent years. Peace, however, was always subject to violation by bandits, large numbers of whom had their headquarters in the mountains. It was no unusual event for travellers on the roads to be shot down and robbed. All men went armed, and official cars always carried beside the driver a man with a loaded rifle between his knees.

Palestine at that time certainly suffered from bandits, but it suffered also from some of the more irresponsible members of its police force. The Royal Irish Constabulary had recently been disbanded, and not a few of its members drifted out to Palestine, one of the few remaining parts of the world where gun-play could be indulged with impunity. Many of these men did excellent

## PUZZLE CRUISE

work in Palestine, but some of the wilder spirits certainly added to the general uneasiness. An instance of the irresponsibility of some of these gentry was a race between two cars on the Haifa-Nazareth road, in which the passengers of one of the furiously driven vehicles tried to disable that of their rivals by shooting at its tyres with their revolvers. On another occasion the howling of a dog brought a bullet whistling down a village street, narrowly missing a group of peaceful citizens.

After a call at Haifa, the new Commander-in-Chief visited Cyprus, where yet another equivocal situation existed. Cyprus had been assigned to the British Empire in 1878, "to be occupied and administered by England," by the Sultan of Turkey in return for support against Russia. Turkey never actually required British help against Russia, but Cyprus was duly occupied. When Turkey joined the Central Powers in the Great War, Cyprus was Turkish territory in British occupation, until it was annexed as a British Colony on November 5th, 1914.

Cyprus, however, contained a large Greek element, and this, under the influence of the prevailing nationalism, wished Cyprus to become part of Greece. In this desire the nationalists certainly had some encouragement. Great Britain had, under stress of circumstances, actually offered Cyprus to Greece in October 1915 as a bribe to induce Greece to enter the war on the side of the Allies. It was not until 1924 that the status of Cyprus as a Crown Colony was formally recognised.

After leaving Cyprus, Sir Osmond Brock entered what was at that time the area of his command most thickly strewn with international complications.

It is doubtful whether the most fertile and warped imagination could have conceived a more involved situation than that ruling in Asia Minor when Sir Osmond Brock arrived there early in July 1922.

Smyrna was the base from which was supplied the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Greek Army under General Hadjianestes, which was then successfully holding at bay the Turkish Nationalist forces under Mustapha Kemal Pasha some 200 miles inland. Smyrna was undoubtedly Turkish territory in Greek occupation. Great Britain's enemy in the Great War was represented by the nominal Turkish Government in Constantinople under the Sultan, Mahommed VI. Constantinople, and, in theory, the whole of Turkey, was under the control of an Inter-Allied Commission in Constantinople. This council consisted of representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Greece.

Italy had no love for the Greek invasion of Asia Minor, and with good reason. Before Italy had joined the Allies in the Great War a treaty had been signed in London on April 26th, 1915. This treaty, to which France was a party, promised to Italy, in the event of victory, a large tract of Asia Minor, including Smyrna – the very territory, in fact, which the Greeks had been encouraged by Mr. Lloyd George and other politicians at Versailles to invade. France did not object to this move, for she was jealous of Italian expansion in the Mediterranean, particularly in proximity to her sphere of influence in Syria. Fear of strong neighbours in this part of the world made France also an opponent of the Turkish Nationalists in Asia Minor. On the other hand, France had no love for the Greeks. She was still smarting under the shame of an incident two years before, when her Black Sea Fleet had become so impregnated with Bolshevik propaganda that it had mutinied off Odessa. The British Admiral, mindful of the British policy of keeping off French corns, had arranged that the French ships, which were in open mutiny, should be surrounded and taken out of harm's way by the Greek Navy.

Thus, in the area of the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean, there was one enemy which had a sort of dual personality, and four Allied Powers, all of which were eaten up with jealousies and rivalries.

## PUZZLE CRUISE

In the midst of these complications the British naval Commander-in-Chief had to pick his way carefully – a very Agag in diplomacy. It is true that in Constantinople Sir Horace Rumbold and not Sir Osmond Brock was the representative of the British Government, but the former had the great advantage of being able to remain in one place.

By virtue of his profession a naval officer must move about, coming into direct and personal contact with many people other than those who hobnob with ambassadors. Moreover, a naval Commander-in-Chief cannot concern himself solely with the problems and difficulties in one particular country or part of the littoral of his command. Sir Osmond had to be just as conversant with the problems of Egypt and Palestine as those of Asia Minor; and when, shortly afterwards, the scene suddenly changed to the Adriatic, he had to deal faithfully with the perplexities of the new scene. These factors make the inevitable diplomatic activities of the naval officer in command at once more difficult and more fascinating than those of His Majesty's official representatives.

It is, perhaps, in tacit acknowledgment of the training and ability of the naval officer to deal with more than one problem that the Admiralty does not accredit a naval attaché to a single country, but to a group of countries. Thus, the British naval attaché in Berlin is not accredited solely to Germany, but is also responsible for Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

At Smyrna, Sir Osmond Brock, in pursuance of his duty to be charming and polite to all concerned, gave a dance on board his flagship. Jealousy and rivalry, however, made the dance an almost complete frost. Much decorated and highly scented officers glared at one another, while the fair sex, probably intimidated by the prospect of carrying inter-Allied feeling on to the quarterdeck of the British flagship, very generally failed



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

to turn up. In all, about fifteen ladies appeared, and no praise could be too high for the indefatigable way in which they whirled through the maze of international complications.

After leaving Smyrna, H.M.S. *Iron Duke* passed up the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmora. Sir Osmond had as his flag captain in H.M.S. *Iron Duke* Captain Dunbar-Nasmith, V.C. One wonders what the thoughts of this officer must have been, standing on the bridge of a battleship steaming peacefully through the narrow and tortuous straits which he had navigated under-water so successfully in Submarine E.11, when they were considered a mine-strewn death-trap. Hanging on the bulkhead of Captain Dunbar-Nasmith's cabin in H.M.S. *Iron Duke* was an historic photograph. It had been taken through the periscope of Submarine E.11, looking right up the Golden Horn during the war. That photograph is now in the Imperial War Museum.

It was on July 12th, 1922, that H.M.S. *Iron Duke* arrived in the Bosphorus and moored off the sugar-candy façade of Dolma Bagtche Palace. The new Commander-in-Chief was immediately plunged into a vortex of international compliments. As his flagship entered the Bosphorus the hills echoed with the reports of the saluting guns of five nations. Official calls in legion had to be received and returned. The guard and band of the Royal Marines seemed to spend most of their waking hours presenting arms and playing foreign national anthems. It is the traditional practice when hoisting the ensign each morning for the band to play "God Save the King," and one of the compliments paid when foreign men-of-war are present is to play the national anthem of their country also at this daily ceremony. At Constantinople the ceremony of hoisting "colours" each morning took an unconscionable time.

Two days later was the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The warships of all nations were "dressed

## PUZZLE CRUISE

overall" with flags during the day, and a salute was fired at noon. After dark, ships were illuminated, with search-lights playing upon a tricolour at the masthead. To a realist it must have seemed strange that these Allied warships, which had recently been combining in the Black Sea against the forces of revolution, should join in celebrating the high point of a revolution. But if there were realists in Constantinople in those days, they were careful to keep their thoughts to themselves, for they lived in an atmosphere of farcical comedy – with the spectre of tragedy always in the wings. Hardly a day passed without the honouring of some festival beloved of one of the diverse nationalities, and on many occasions nobody but the staff of the Commander-in-Chief knew what was being celebrated. That no international incident occurred through omission to respect any such festival or anniversary is a great tribute to a harassed staff.

The flagship had been at Constantinople a bare fortnight before international crisis reared its head.

The Greeks apparently got tired of their war in Asia Minor and conceived the idea that they could end it quickly by striking at the Turkish capital. Whether this theory could be justified seems extremely doubtful, for Angora was Mustapha Kemal Pasha's capital and not Constantinople, which housed his nominal enemies.

There is no doubt that the Greeks were also suffering from swelled heads. No wonder. They had been encouraged by Great Britain to embark upon their Anatolian adventure, and had for long been in the position of doing the dirty work for the Allies by keeping the Turkish Nationalist forces fully occupied.

Whatever the reasoning of the Greek high command, two divisions of Greek troops were moved secretly from Asia Minor to Europe. When these troops were ready, close to the Chatalja lines – the European defences of the inter-Allied zone round Constantinople, which ran across the peninsula from the Sea of Marmora to the Black Sea

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

some thirty miles to the west of the Bosphorus – Greece announced her intention of occupying Constantinople.

This caused the utmost consternation among the Allies. The Chatalja lines were held – thinly – by the French, and it looked as if an inter-Allied war would break out at any moment.

The threat was made on July 29th, when the Greek Minister for Foreign Affairs handed to the British Ambassador in Athens a note stating that the Greek Government had come to the conclusion that only the occupation of Constantinople by the Greek Army would bring about peace.

While the wires were humming between the chancelleries of Europe, Constantinople became the scene of frenzied activity. Hurried inter-Allied councils were held. French reinforcements were rushed up to the Chatalja lines. To replace these in Constantinople, where there was very real fear of disturbances, British troops were brought across the Bosphorus from their quarters on the Asiatic side.

In the Bosphorus, too, there was great activity. The Greek warships, which were always in and out of Constantinople, had slipped away two days before. It had been put about that these ships were sailing in order to carry out exercises in the Sea of Marmora.

The Bosphorus was no place for British battleships to lie peacefully at anchor with the threat of war so close. Moreover, the Royal Navy might be needed at any moment to give support to the French flanks resting on the shores of the Black Sea and Sea of Marmora.

H.M.S. *Benbow* arrived in the Bosphorus on July 31st, and Sir Osmond Brock then had with him off Constantinople all the six battleships of the Mediterranean Fleet: H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, H.M.S. *Benbow*, H.M.S. *King George V*, H.M.S. *Marlborough*, H.M.S. *Ajax*, and H.M.S. *Centurion*. Also with the Admiral were the small seaplane-carrier *Pegasus*, the destroyer

## PUZZLE CRUISE

depot ship *Diligence*, and the destroyers *Senator*, *Seraph*, *Shark*, *Sikh*, *Sirdar*, *Sparrowhawk*, *Spear*, *Splendid*, and *Sportive*.

Sir Osmond Brock sailed immediately with this fleet. By so doing he at once demonstrated to the Greeks that Great Britain was taking the threat to Constantinople seriously, and was prepared to take strong action to prevent it being put into effect. Moreover, he had the Greeks guessing. They did not know where the British Fleet had gone, and they were painfully aware that, committed as they were in Asia Minor, they were extremely vulnerable to the exercise of sea power.

The movements of British warships in other parts of the Mediterranean helped to show that Great Britain was not to be trifled with. The Third Light Cruiser Squadron, under Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt, together with two destroyers, had been on a cruise to Italian ports when the Greeks made their threat. All these ships immediately abandoned their cruise and hurried back to Malta, there to take in fuel, stores, and ammunition before proceeding to join the Commander-in-Chief off Constantinople.

Faced with this show of strength and determination, the Greek Government had abrupt second thoughts. Assurances were given that no attempt would be made to occupy Constantinople without the consent of the Allies, and the Greek troops were withdrawn from Chat-alja. The threat of inter-Allied war went off the boil.

### CHAPTER III

## END OF A CITY

Kemal's great offensive – anxiety at Smyrna – refugees – massacre and fire

THE THREAT OF THE GREEKS to occupy Constantinople, and their repulse at the hands of the other Allied Powers, was a prelude to other events which demonstrated that the attempt of the politicians to redraw the map of the Near East was abortive.

The idealism of the politicians had from the first been encumbered by contradictions which added fuel to smouldering fires. The Allies had shown themselves incapable of coming to any rapid decision on the future of Constantinople and Turkey. Wildly opportunist actions had set the Allied Powers snarling at one another's throats. That snarls had not already developed into snaps was largely due to the stabilising influence provided by British military – and particularly naval – strength.

In the summer of 1922, the centrifugal forces of this international whirligig overcame the forces of inertia ranged on the side of the peace treaties.

This affected Great Britain very deeply. British politicians had been responsible for the major blunder – the Greek invasion of territory which had belonged to Turkey and should have belonged by treaty to Italy. British interests were deeply involved in the Near East. What had started as an inconsequent game of “consequences” in Versailles was destined to become a *saufve qui peut* in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Mustapha Kemal was a patriot well aware that nothing could be expected of the weak and effete Sultan Mahomed VI, who resided in Constantinople under the ægis

## END OF A CITY

of an Inter-Allied Commission of Control. Kemal was a military leader of experience and high ability. It had been his skill that had prevented the British landing at Suvla, on the Gallipoli Peninsula, from achieving its purpose. Later he had gained invaluable experience in fighting the losing campaign against Allenby in Syria. He was a man with an ideal, and one possessed of immense driving-force to the attainment of his ideal. Witness his advice to youth: "Don't be tempted by a desire to be popular with every idiot you meet. All sorts of people will come along to you with their own ideas and try to divert you from your path. People will place all kinds of obstacles in your way."

One can only presume that the British authorities lacked appreciation of the man and his capabilities when, three weeks after the alarm caused by the Greek threat to the Chatalja lines, they allowed the major portion of the fleet to disperse. "Intelligence" was, of course, meagre, and it was always extremely difficult to sift out real news from the network of rumour, much of which was inspired by a desire to score off somebody.

Just as Mustapha Kemal Pasha was embarking upon his great offensive against the Greeks in Asia Minor, many of the major units of the British fleet went off on a cruise. Kemal's movements began with a few feinting attacks against the Greek positions in the Meander Valley.

These began on August 18th and lasted for three days. On the very day they commenced, the British flagship took in 1,130 tons of coal preparatory to leaving Constantinople. Two days later H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, flying the flag of Admiral Sir Osmond Brock, the Commander-in-Chief, left Constantinople.

Sir Osmond first paid a visit to Tuzla Bay, where the ex-German battle cruiser *Goeben* lay moored. The ship which had been instrumental in bringing Turkey into the war on the side of the Central Powers was of little account as a warship. She was now Turkish, and

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

was called the *Sultan Yavuz Selim*, and she had a hole in her side below water through which a tramcar could have been driven. Nevertheless, she was a constant bogey to the Allied authorities in Turkey, and a British destroyer was detailed month after month to act as "*Goeben* guard."

From Tuzla Bay H.M.S. *Iron Duke* went to Kilia Liman, in the Dardanelles. The Gallipoli Peninsula was still scored with trenches and redoubts. Wrecks lay round its coasts, and its shores were almost paved with splintered steel and tragic remnants of equipment. A few farmers blunted ploughshares on shells, and occasionally blew themselves up in the process. Otherwise the inhabitants were composed chiefly of the Allied War Graves Commission, under Colonel Hughes, and its employees. British officers went ashore to shoot partridges. . . .

From the Dardanelles the Commander-in-Chief went back to the Bosphorus.

While H.M.S. *Iron Duke* had been away from Constantinople, Mustapha Kemal's forces had carried out a further series of feint attacks – this time in the Brusa sector in the extreme north. Like the former series of feint attacks, these drew Greek troops away from the centre. The significance of none of these attacks, however, seems to have been appreciated by the British authorities.

On August 28th, 1922, Mustapha Kemal launched his great attack on the weakened Greek centre, in the vicinity of Afium Karahissar – an important railway junction and strategical post in the middle of Asia Minor. Turkish forces entered the town of Afium Karahissar the same day, but the battle which took its name from that remote railway junction raged for three days. The third day of the battle saw the Greeks, decisively defeated, in full retreat.

The Greek retreat began in earnest on August 31st. Early that same morning the British naval Commander-in-Chief left the Bosphorus – not, on this occasion, for

## END OF A CITY

a short cruise in the immediate vicinity. The Adriatic was the objective!

There, also, the map was being redrawn and new nations were emerging from the fog of war. The first port of call in the Adriatic was to be Gravosa, close to what was Ragusa and is now Dubrovnik. On the way, there was much anxiety on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. On arrival, compliments would have to be paid to the new country, yet nobody knew what was the Yugo-Slav ensign, much less the national anthem!

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 2nd, H.M.S. *Iron Duke* was in the Doro Channel, between Negropont and Andros, when an urgent signal was received by wireless. The British flagship doubled on her tracks and set course for Smyrna.

It has been said that there is a special providence which guides the movements of the ships of the Royal Navy. In this case there certainly seemed to be grounds for such a belief, for Sir Osmond Brock was then nearly 350 miles nearer to Smyrna than he would have been if he had remained at Constantinople.

Fortunate chance thus brought the British flagship first to Smyrna. By that time it was clear that General Hadjianestes had lost all control over his troops, which were in full retreat, only pausing here and there to rape, pillage, and burn. Meanwhile General Tricoupis, one of the most important of the Greek commanders, had been captured by the Turks. On the following day, September 3rd, the Greek Government asked the Powers to negotiate an armistice. The suggestion found favour nowhere, not even with General Hadjianestes, who was optimistic almost to the point of insanity.

The rôle of the British Navy in this *débâcle* was at first far from clear. Was it the duty of the British warships to support the action of the politicians, and therefore the Greeks, when it was clear that to do so would involve Great Britain in further hostilities? The wireless was



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

busy, and London decreed that the British Navy was only to protect British lives and interests.

The latter was an equivocal term. Sir Osmond Brock and those under him had to concern themselves with British prestige – an exceedingly difficult matter in view of the edict of Whitehall that its champions, the Greeks, were to be left in the lurch. British interests in the East are inextricably bound up with prestige.

There were some 4,000 British nationals in Smyrna, mostly Maltese and Cypriots. These had a clear knowledge of the events of the past two years, and to them the arrival of British warships meant that their homes were to be protected from the advancing Turks. When H.M.S. *Iron Duke* arrived, one old Cypriot shopkeeper assured everybody that they were perfectly safe, as the battleship was to land 5,000 men next morning for their protection.

That was the prevalent spirit, and in the face of it the preservation of even the remnants of British prestige was extremely difficult.

The Greek battleships *Kilkis* and *Lemnos* were in the harbour when H.M.S. *Iron Duke* arrived. The Admiral of the Greek squadron immediately paid an official call on Sir Osmond Brock. He had been glad to see the British flagship entering the bay, for he expected support which would stiffen the Greek forces ashore and enable Smyrna at least to be denied to the Turkish Nationalists. His joy turned to consternation not unmingled with anger when he was told officially that no British support was to be given to his countrymen.

Later in the day another British battleship arrived. This was H.M.S. *King George V*. On her way from Constantinople she had struck an uncharted pinnacle rock in the Mitylene Channel. This had ripped open part of her bottom, and her foremost boiler-room was flooded.

That day there were anxious conversations between Sir Osmond Brock and Sir Harry Lamb, the British Consul-General. Two things seemed clear. The Greeks

## END OF A CITY

were unlikely to hold even the town of Smyrna against the Turks; and the Turkish entry would probably be attended by massacres.

Smyrna was the centre of bloodthirsty racial differences of long standing. There had been hope of a long close season for the massacring of Armenians, but this seemed to be dashed by the Turkish advance. The Turks had many a score to work off against the Armenians, of whom there were several thousands in and around Smyrna. Nor were the Armenians in the good books of the Greeks. The Turks, moreover, were exceedingly angry with the Greeks for having invaded Asia Minor. That they were only too glad to seize any opportunity to "take it out" of any Greek with whom they fell in was already manifest from the tales which filtered back from the fighting – or rather the retreating – line.

In face of these probabilities, immediate arrangements were made for the evacuation of British nationals.

In one way the feeling of security which had pervaded those ashore as soon as the British battleships arrived was a blessing, though later it was to prove a source of serious embarrassment. The population remained calm in spite of a flood of refugees and wounded Greek soldiers from the interior. Thus, beyond one or two arguments inspired by the Levantine passion for driving lengthy and lucrative bargains, the British naval authorities were able to press forward their preparations unhindered.

There were a number of small steamers in the harbour, and several of these were taken over by the British Navy for evacuation purposes. The means by which this was done passed through every shade from downright commandeering to chartering. No shipowner, however, regretted the British naval action. Compensation and charter was on a generous scale. Moreover, it carried with it a protection which might at any moment prove exceedingly valuable. It is one thing to have a ship commandeered by British authorities, and quite another

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

thing to have one commandeered by Greek authorities with an exceedingly doubtful Government behind them.

The condition and constitution of the Greek Government was, indeed, the subject of constant rumour. It was said that the Greek Cabinet had resigned as a consequence of the defeat of their Anatolian Army. It was even rumoured that King Constantine had been murdered. Fortunately this report proved false, although it anticipated events in that the defeat in Asia Minor afterwards cost King Constantine his throne.

The biggest of the steamers taken over in the first instance by the British Navy were S.S. *Antioch* and S.S. *Elpiniki*. Armed guards were placed on board these ships, which were provisioned from the battleships. They were then moved close to the piers from which it had been decided that British nationals should be embarked. These piers were away from the town and the commercial harbour, as it was feared that the population of Smyrna might panic if refugees were embarked in the crowded districts.

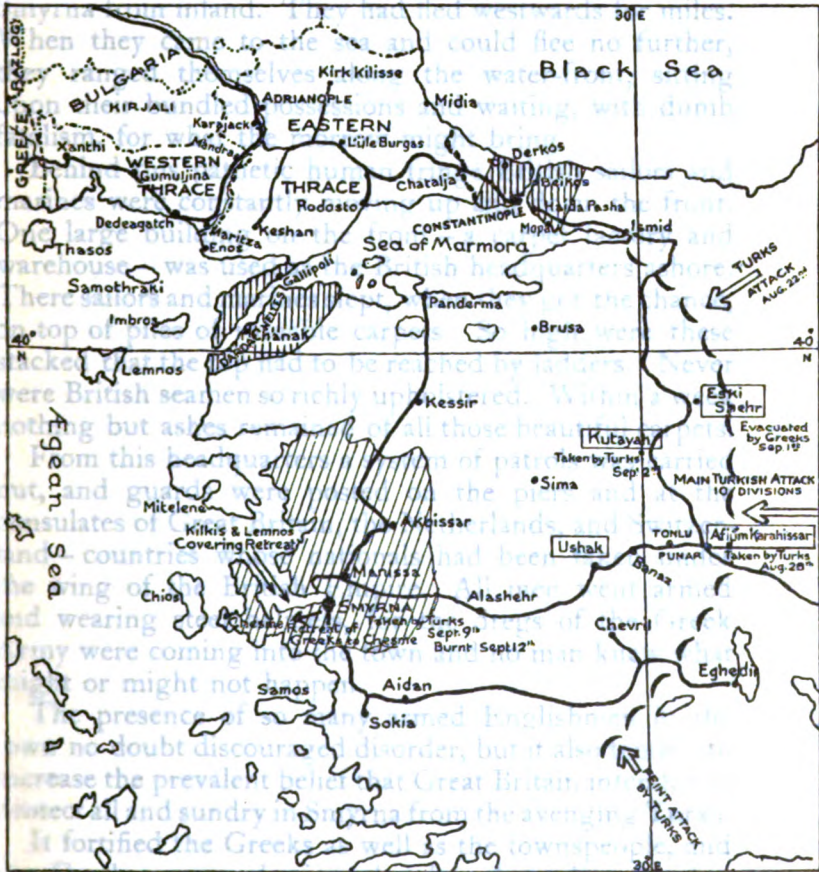
Meanwhile messages were sent to all the British nationals ashore, giving them detailed instructions for embarking in the refugee ships and asking them to move at once so as to avoid a rush at the last moment.

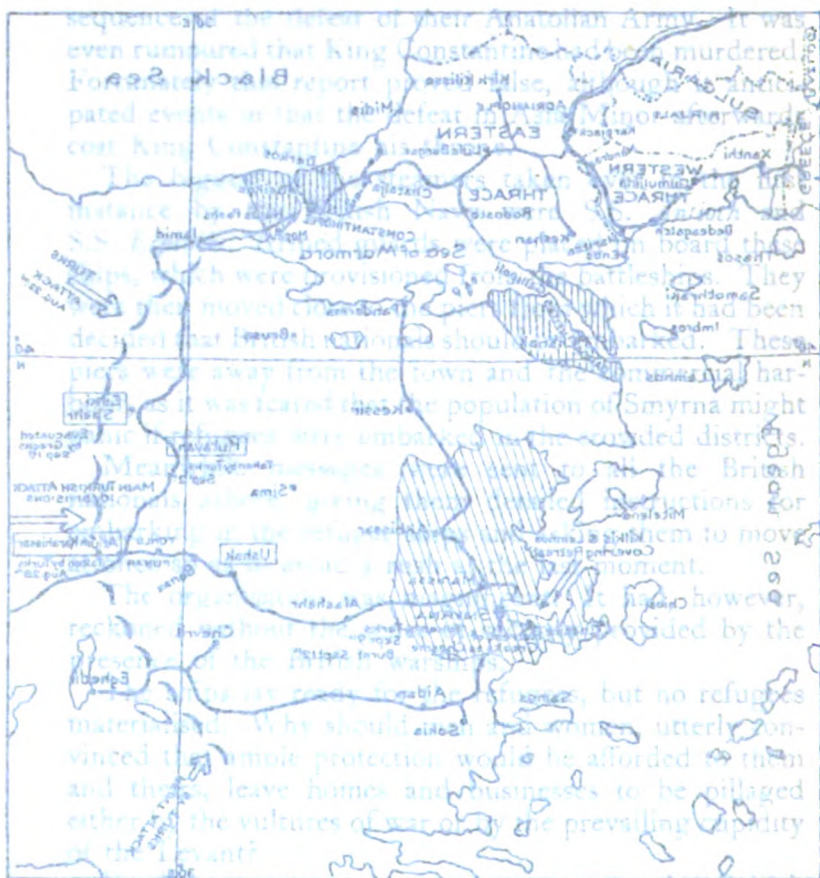
The organisation was magnificent. It had, however, reckoned without the sense of security provided by the presence of the British warships.

The ships lay ready for the refugees, but no refugees materialised. Why should men and women, utterly convinced that ample protection would be afforded to them and theirs, leave homes and businesses to be pillaged either by the vultures of war or by the prevailing cupidity of the Levant?

Further messengers were sent out to the British nationals, beseeching them to make their way to the refugee ships which had been provided. At last a small number of refugees turned up and were duly accommodated in the ships. These, however, represented a

# MAP I





## END OF A CITY

timorous minority, among whom were several wasters who had nothing to lose in Smyrna and were merely seizing the chance of a free passage to fresh fields in Malta or Cyprus.

Meanwhile thousands of refugees were pouring into Smyrna from inland. They had fled westwards for miles. When they came to the sea and could flee no further, they ranged themselves along the water-front, sitting upon their bundled possessions and waiting, with dumb fatalism, for what the morrow might bring.

Behind this pathetic human fringe British sailors and marines were constantly moving up and down the front. One large building on the front – a carpet factory and warehouse – was used as the British headquarters ashore. There sailors and marines slept, when they got the chance, on top of piles of valuable carpets. So high were these stacked that the top had to be reached by ladders. Never were British seamen so richly upholstered. Within a week nothing but ashes remained of all those beautiful carpets.

From this headquarters a system of patrols was carried out, and guards were posted on the piers and at the consulates of Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland – countries whose nationals had been taken under the wing of the British Empire. All men went armed and wearing steel helmets, for the dregs of the Greek Army were coming into the town and no man knew what might or might not happen.

The presence of so many armed Englishmen in the town no doubt discouraged disorder, but it also tended to increase the prevalent belief that Great Britain intended to protect all and sundry in Smyrna from the avenging Turks.

It fortified the Greeks as well as the townspeople, and the Greek commander issued orders that a line running through Manissa – some twenty miles east of Smyrna – was to be held against the advancing Turks. These orders, however, were not taken very seriously. The demoralisation of the Greek soldiery was plain for all to

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

see. They fought among themselves in their panic-stricken rush for the gangways of the inadequate transports, and men could be seen trying to swarm up the mooring hawsers like rats. They got rid of horses by the simple means of driving them into the harbour to drown, and in some cases gouging out their eyes to make sure that they would be of no use to the Turks.

In the bay more and more warships arrived. It seemed that every European nation was anxious that its navy should be in at the death. Another British battleship – H.M.S. *Ajax* – arrived, the cruiser H.M.S. *Cardiff* and several destroyers. France was represented by the battleships *Ernest Renan*, *Edgar Quinet*, and *Jean Bart*. America sent two destroyers from Constantinople. Italy sent her cruiser flagship, the *Venezia*.

The feelings of the Italians must have been decidedly mixed when, at a conference on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, the Italian Admiral was informed that Great Britain had no intention of helping the Greeks to retain their foothold in Asia Minor. Nothing, therefore, could prevent the expulsion of the usurper from territory which Italy claimed as her share of the spoils of war. On the other hand, the Greek invasion of Anatolia had stimulated a Turkish national revival of such strength that Italy's chance of securing her portion of Asia Minor was becoming even more remote.

Ashore the situation was becoming more and more anxious. Refugees now choked the water-front. Not only did they and their belongings attract the attention of the lawless elements in the town, but there was a very real fear that panic and massacre might be let loose. The Greeks had abandoned their optimistic hope of holding a line through Manissa and had communicated to the Powers their intention to abandon Smyrna altogether. Thereupon the Powers had sent a message to Mustapha Kemal Pasha asking him to hurry up and occupy the city – a somewhat redundant request, since the Turkish

## END OF A CITY

advanced forces were approaching Smyrna as fast as possible, with every intention of occupying it and driving into the sea any invaders who might remain.

The refugee situation on the water-front forced the British naval authorities to extend their activities in the name of common humanity. The first step was to get them – or as many of them as possible – away from the town itself. To this end they were hustled in their thousands into large lighters, of which there were a number in the harbour. These were then towed by naval picket-boats to the detached mole and secured there. Thus thousands of refugees were separated from the mainland by some 400 yards of sea. They were marooned on the lighters and the detached mole, where there was neither food nor water.

The British Navy then set about feeding and watering these unfortunates, nearly all of whom were half starved and crazy with thirst.

Fortunately the large ships all carried provisions for three months. Boats were kept busy day and night. The warships themselves were practically denuded of provisions. On more than one occasion there was an ugly incident when a provision boat was rushed by hunger-maddened refugees.

In spite of all efforts, the plight of the refugees was pitiful. Many of them swam off to the warships, where they clambered up the gangways dripping and naked. These were an embarrassment in more senses than one. They had to be dried. Clothing had to be found for them, and the question of their disposal was an ever-pressing problem.

Early in the morning of September 9th reinforcements had to be landed from the British battleships. The town was now virtually without any control, and there was much shooting and looting. One or two machine guns appeared, one of which covered a street corner close to the British headquarters in the carpet warehouse. It



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

seemed as if the British forces which had declined in the first place to protect the town from the Turks were being forced in the name of humanity to protect Smyrna from itself.

The part of the British forces ashore in Smyrna was very difficult and unpleasant. The men were forced on occasions to witness atrocities, but they had strict orders not to interfere. In the later stages of their occupation, moreover, they had to dodge bullets.

Shortly before noon on September 9th, however, the first advance bodies of Turkish Nationalist cavalry entered the town. They were travel-stained and weary, but their bearing was in sharp contrast to that of the Greeks who had been passing through the town during the previous days.

Sight of the Turks led to a panic among those refugees who remained on the water-front, and many of them flung themselves into the harbour. Pitiful as they were, the refugees had among them dangerous customers. As the Turkish cavalry commander rode past a crowd of these refugees, a bomb was thrown. It missed its mark and fell in the harbour close under the stern of one of the British naval steamboats.

All that day Turkish detachments arrived in Smyrna. A feature of their equipment was the little mountain guns and machine guns on wheeled mountings. During the day and night the major pre-occupation of the British naval forces ashore was keeping out of trouble, for the Turkish arrivals had led to an increase in the shooting in the rabbit-warren of streets behind the front. The British naval forces in the bay were busy with the refugee problem. Where, two days before, there had been general reluctance to claim the privileges of British nationality, thousands of every colour, creed, and tongue now swore by all their gods that they were British nationals.

The refugees in the lighters and on the detached mole continued to be a source of anxiety. The British war-ships had practically no food left, and the refugees were becoming more and more panic-stricken. Then the

## END OF A CITY

Greek battleships began a spasmodic shelling of the town. The town was, at least, the avowed objective, but several shells fell in the bay and harbour unpleasantly close to the refugees and to the British warships. A sharp protest from Sir Osmond Brock persuaded the Greek Admiral that it would be wise for him to increase the range on his gun-sights.

On the morning after the entry of the first Turkish troops into Smyrna the Turks were seen to be posting six machine guns on the water-front in positions from which they covered the refugees in the lighters and on the detached mole. It was clear that a horrible massacre was imminent, and Captain Dunbar-Nasmith, V.C., hurried ashore to try to avert it. He landed on the front and, placing himself in front of the muzzles of the machine guns, demanded to see the Turkish commander. This worthy explained that he intended to search the lighters for persons implicated in the massacres of Turks which had taken place in 1919. This rather ingenuous explanation made it clear that the real intention was to wipe out blood with blood in the true tradition of the Near East.

There was little enough that Captain Dunbar-Nasmith could do. He seized upon the Turkish explanation and succeeded in extracting a promise that only two lighters at a time would be searched, and that these would be towed to the shore for the purpose.

As soon as Captain Dunbar-Nasmith left the shore the Turks broke their promise. They tried to tow ten lighters across the harbour. Their seamanship, however, did not prove equal to this task. Many of the lighters broke loose and drifted down upon H.M.S. *Tribune*, which was moored in the inner harbour in readiness to effect a speedy evacuation of the British forces ashore if this should prove necessary.

Whether the Turks ever carried out a search for those who had taken part in the 1919 massacres will never be known. Certain it is that another massacre took place—

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in an open space to the southward of the harbour. For the next three days boats were kept busy round the British warships, sinking corpses by tying old fire-bars to them.

Mustapha Kemal Pasha arrived in Smyrna that afternoon. Sir Harry Lamb, the British Consul-General, went to see him, and was told curtly by Kemal that he considered that a state of war existed between him and the Allies. This, of course, could not be accepted, and the Royal Navy took a hand in diplomacy. Sir Osmond Brock sent his Chief-of-Staff, Commodore Barry Domville, to Kemal with a very stiff note. Kemal abruptly changed his tune, said that nothing was further from his intentions than war with the Allies, and particularly with Great Britain. At the same time he requested that the British forces should be evacuated from Smyrna, as the town was now under control.

The latter statement was open to doubt, for there was still much shooting, particularly in the Armenian quarter and in the direction of the bazaars. Nevertheless, the opportunity was seized to extricate British seamen and marines from a situation which was becoming hourly more dangerous. All the British forces were evacuated by H.M.S. *Tribune* that evening.

Although the Turks were – nominally at least – in control of Smyrna, the remains of the Greek Army were still ashore. The Greeks had been unable to provide sufficient transports for the evacuation of all their troops at Smyrna. The remains of their army were fighting a rearguard action along the southern shore of the gulf towards the little port of Chesme, where the Greeks had further transports. In this action the Greek battleships *Kilkis* and *Lemnos* took part by shelling the road behind their retreating troops. The shooting was spasmodic and inaccurate, but it appeared to annoy the Turks, who retaliated with field guns. This proved uncomfortable for most of the Allied warships in the bay, who were liable to be hit by an “over” or a ricochet.

Smyrna on fire



Smyrna before the fire – H.M.S. *Iron Duke* in the bay



## END OF A CITY

The final phase of the tragic drama of Smyrna opened early in the afternoon of Wednesday, September 13th. It began with a small column of smoke on the outskirts of the Armenian quarter of the town. At first it seemed an unimportant fire. By six o'clock that evening, however, at least a quarter of the city was on fire, and by nightfall practically the whole of Smyrna was in flames.

It is certain that the great fire of Smyrna was assisted, if not actually started, by human agency. It was said that the Armenian quarter was ringed with fire, and that anyone who escaped was shot down. Certainly there was plenty of shooting. It is exceedingly unlikely, however, that the Turkish Nationalists, having just gained a prize so rich as Smyrna, would have fired it. It seems probable that the human agency which assisted the fire was that of Turkish irregulars, who hit on this way of getting even with their enemies and at the same time eliminating traces of their nefarious work.

The horror of fire drove hundreds to drowning in the harbour. Again the British Navy answered the call of humanity. Every available boat, their crews heavily armed to enable them to repel rushes, was sent inshore to save as many as possible.

That night the water-front would have held its own against the imagination of Dante. The great flagstones were hot. The refugees were shrieking in panic. Pistol and rifle shots and the occasional rat-tat-tat of a machine gun sounded above the roar of the fire and the crash of falling buildings.

While two ships, the S.S. *Karnak* and the S.S. *Euterpe*, were filled with refugees, a party of seamen were led at the double through part of the burning town by Captain C. J. C. Little. This expedition returned with the inmates of the European maternity home, snatched from certain death and carried through streets lined with flames to the security of the White Ensign.

## CHAPTER IV

### WAR FEVER

Diplomatic acrobatics – the Dardanelles neutral zones – trench-digging and reinforcements – war fever – the peace of Mudania

THE REMOVAL, at the request of Mustapha Kemal Pasha, of British bluejackets and marines from Smyrna, on the eve of the destruction of that city, was far from solving the dilemmas of the British naval forces in the Near East.

The major bone of contention – the Greek invasion of Asia Minor – was certainly removed. But there had arisen in its place a new force of which nobody knew the strength nor the ultimate objectives.

Kemal had emphatically denied that he considered himself at war with the Entente Powers. It was clear, however, that he was not likely to stand still during a prolonged spell of diplomatic shilly-shallying. Moreover, his aims were clearly in opposition to those of the Entente Powers. He was forging a new, powerful, and united Turkey. The Entente Powers were ranged upon the side of a weak Turkey governed by the Sultan in Constantinople. They were, in fact, supporting a *status quo* while Kemal struggled for reform. In this Great Britain and France were actuated by the desire to prevent any expansion of Bolshevik Russia. They knew that the Bolshevik general, Michael Frunze, had been sent by Moscow to help Kemal. The divergence in these aims was to bring Great Britain to the verge of war and involve the Entente Powers in a veritable orgy of face-saving before the leader of the new Turkey had his way.

The new situation in Asia Minor brought an array of

## WAR FEVER

problems in its wake. The Greeks, who appear to have been exploited in the most shameless manner by the other interested Powers, were the guardians of the neutral zone which had been established on the Asiatic shores of the Dardanelles. With the collapse of the Greek armies in Anatolia all the Greek garrisons were withdrawn from the vicinity of the Dardanelles. It was perhaps as well that this was done, as the continued presence of any Greek forces on the soil of Asia Minor might well have led to swift and decisive action by the Turkish Nationalists.

Nevertheless, it presented the Entente Powers with a problem. Although the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, France, and Italy had reaffirmed, six months before, the intention of their Governments to restore Constantinople to the full authority of the Sultan, none of these Powers felt disposed to withdraw their troops from Constantinople to act as police in the neutral zones. Inter-Allied prestige and jealousy played its part, as it did in every problem in the Near East at that time. If one nation withdrew troops from Constantinople, who would be the first to move?

A neutral zone without any form of guardianship is like a plot of land advertised for immediate occupation without price, rent, or other obligation. If the neutral zones were to be anything more than polite fictions, it was essential that some form of control should replace the Greek garrisons without delay. Greece was the only Power with troops within reasonable distance, and Greece was out of court. No other Power could produce men for the neutral zones within a practicable time-limit.

The Inter-Allied Commission in Constantinople was accustomed to dealing with the seemingly impossible. It speedily produced a solution to this problem of the policing of the neutral zones — zones upon the neutrality of which the whole Near Eastern policy of the Allied Powers hung, as a rotting skeleton used to hang upon a gibbet. The collapse of the gibbet would have led to the disintegration



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

of the skeleton. A new force was formed for the especial benefit of the neutral zones. This consisted of a Turkish *gendarmarie* under British officers.

This force occupied the main centres of the neutral zone on the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles, notably Bigha and Ezine.

This curious *gendarmarie* never gave cause for distrust, although its very composition made it suspect. Turkish loyalties were in a state of flux, with an ever-growing bias towards Mustapha Kemal, and the few British officers had nothing in the way of constructive policy to offer as a counter-attraction.

That the Dardanelles was the danger-point, the evacuation of which by the Entente Powers would almost certainly be demanded – and possibly enforced – by Kemal, dawned on the Foreign Offices of Europe a mere five days after the Turkish advance guards had entered Smyrna.

Immediately there was great diplomatic activity. As ever, the British Navy found itself in the rôle of the most potent and ubiquitous of diplomatic weapons.

Sir Osmond Brock, the British naval Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, left the burning ruins of Smyrna on the evening of September 14th, 1922. Next morning his flagship anchored off Chanak, in the narrows of the Dardanelles. Within an hour more than 100 men had been landed. These marched about two miles inland, where they found lines of white tape carefully pegged down on the dry soil. These, and a large dump of picks and shovels, were presided over by two or three officers of the British Army under Colonel Shuttleworth. The sailors were told to dig – and dig they did, until, by 3.30 that afternoon, the dry soil of Anatolia had yielded a very fair-looking trench line and over a hundred monumental thirsts. The sailors marched back to their boats, their throats too dry to do more than croak their views upon the Army and white tape. The ship had to leave that

## WAR FEVER

night for Constantinople, where a number of store-ships had been assembled, for all the provisions had been distributed among the refugees at Smyrna.

The digging of that dusty trench line near Chanak did not have any effect upon the "war." It demonstrated, however, the general atmosphere of "wind up" which pervaded that part of the world as a result of the Kemalist rout of the Greeks. The boundary of the neutral zone on the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles was between twenty-five and thirty miles from Chanak. Yet British sailors had had to dig trenches little more than two miles from Chanak, and that under conditions not far removed from panic.

Realisation that serious events were crowding upon the commitments of Great Britain in the Near East galvanised Whitehall into action. Reinforcements, both naval and military, for the British forces in the Near East were hastily prepared and sent out.

Within a fortnight there had arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean four battleships of the First Battle Squadron, Atlantic Fleet; the greater part of the Second Cruiser Squadron; the First, Second, and Third Destroyer Flotillas; submarines, depot ships, and a small fleet of auxiliaries. Transports crowded with troops hurried eastwards. By the end of the month the 3rd Battalion the Coldstream Guards, the 2nd Battalion the Royal Fusiliers, the 2nd Battalion the Rifle Brigade, and other units had arrived in the Near East.

Under the influence of the "war-fever" the large Bay of Mudros, in the island of Lemnos, about fifty miles from the entrance to the Dardanelles, regained the importance it had known in 1916. It became crowded with store-ships, transports, oilers, colliers, and ammunition ships. The British lion was stirring to some purpose.

The ultimate objective of this show of force was, however, not immediately obvious. The ejection of

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Greece from Asia Minor and the power of the Turkish Nationalists under Mustapha Kemal were two accomplished facts, neither of which could be nullified by the presence at this late stage in the proceedings of a British armada and expeditionary force, however imposing.

Great Britain was concerned with the maintenance of the *status quo* set up by the peace treaties. True, this had already been rudely upset to the south-eastward of the Dardanelles, but there remained the far more important question of the straits themselves and the adjacent parts of Europe. It was clear that Kemal, if he should gain control of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, would demand the evacuation of those regions by the Entente Powers and close the straits.

The prevention of such a contingency, and the rehabilitation of British prestige in the Near East, were objectives worth vast expenditure. Neither were they disinterested. Bolshevik Russia remained the bogey man. With the straits closed, Russia would be able to plan and carry out all sorts of mischief in the south-east without anybody being able to keep an eye on her or say her nay. There was also the commercial consideration. The straits commanded the supply of oil from the Rumanian fields and the Batoum pipe line, and there was the probability that the bogey man might again be in a position to export large quantities of grain from Odessa.

While reinforcements were on their way to the Near East the British Mediterranean Fleet was left with the difficult task of preserving both peace and the neutral zones – two incompatibles which could only be achieved by temporisation coupled with frenzied preparations for the worst. Already Kemal had laid claim, not only to the neutral zones on each side of the Dardanelles, but to the whole of Turkey in Europe and both Eastern and Western Thrace. These provinces comprised the whole of what is now Turkey in Europe and a large slice of what is now Greek territory in Macedonia.

## WAR FEVER

Day after day the crews of the British warships were kept busy fusing shell, until the ammunition for every gun ranging from the 13·5-inch of the battleships to the 6-inch of the cruisers and 4-inch of the destroyers was all fused and in readiness for instant action. It was fortunate that extra shells had been embarked at Malta some months before. Bombardment positions were chosen, observation posts set up, and bombardment charts prepared. Landing-parties were organised to stiffen the paucity of troops in the hastily dug trenches guarding Chanak and Scutari. Machine-gun posts were chosen. Khaki for the naval officers and men was hastily manufactured on board by the simple process of dyeing white duck suits in strong black coffee. Destroyers maintained day and night patrols both in the Sea of Marmora and in the *Ægean*. These were in order to prevent any Kemalist troops from effecting a landing in Europe and also to prevent gun-running. It was known that, in Eastern Thrace at all events, there was a strong element in favour of Turkish nationalism. There was always the fear that the arming and mobilisation of this element might find Constantinople, the Sea of Marmora, and the straits in the unenviable position of the meat in a sandwich.

With the few troops available it was obviously impossible to hold a line extending the whole twenty miles between the Sea of Marmora and the Black Sea to the eastward of the Bosphorus. The task of preventing the percolation of Kemalist forces across the Bosphorus into Europe, therefore, fell upon the Navy.

A heterogeneous collection of craft was therefore assembled, armed with machine and Lewis guns, manned from the heavy ships, and organised as a Bosphorus patrol flotilla. The units of this flotilla ranged from war-time motor-launches, picket-boats, harbour-launches, to ferry-boats. They were to patrol the whole length of the Bosphorus day and night in such a manner as to make it

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

impossible for even a native *caïque* to slip across. Had the Kemalist forces been able to reach the eastern shores of the Bosphorus in strength, this unarmoured flotilla would have been in a most unpleasant position, for the little vessels could have been raked by machine-gun fire from the hills.

At the Dardanelles there were insufficient craft to organise such a patrol. The destroyer patrols covered the entrances to the straits. In the straits themselves it was a question of preventing the Turks from reaching the Asiatic shore. The trenches were lightly held, but they were supported by the guns of a battleship lying off Kilia Liman. Such artillery support, however, would depend upon indirect spotting. It was decided to improve upon this by mounting batteries on the heights above Kilid Bahr, on the European side of the Narrows. Turkish guns which had defended the Gallipoli Peninsula against the British onslaughts in 1916 were put into commission for the opposite purpose – British warships operating in the Near East in those days carried about with them the breech blocks of every serviceable gun on Gallipoli.

To these Turkish guns was added a battery of British 6-inch guns. These guns were dismounted from one of the battleships – H.M.S. *Benbow* – landed, and dragged up the rocky bluff, at the top of which they were mounted upon platforms devised from concrete, rocks, and heavy timbers.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the magnitude of this task. A 6-inch naval gun, without its mounting, weighs  $7\frac{1}{2}$  tons. In a battleship such guns are securely mounted in heavy armoured shields. At the Dardanelles there was no dockyard – no jetty fitted with cranes for handling such heavy weights – only an open and often wind-blown anchorage. Nor was there means of transport or power to carry them up to the heights. By magnificent seamanship, temporary sheer-legs, blocks

## WAR FEVER

and tackles, rollers, and "pully-hauls," the British seamen achieved what lesser men would have considered impossible.

None of these preparations went forward without interruption. There were constant alarms. On September 23rd, 1922, Turkish forces entered the Chanak neutral zone from the eastward at Bigha and Chan Bazarkeui. The light patrols of *gendarmarie* could not have offered any effective resistance to the Nationalists, even had the Turkish rank and file of this curious force been reliable. Nevertheless, the invading Turks were persuaded, by a mixture of threats and promises of a conference, to withdraw.

On the same night one of the British patrolling destroyers, H.M.S. *Speedy*, was sunk in the Sea of Marmora as the result of a collision with a Turkish tug steaming with lights obscured. Not long afterwards another British destroyer was fired on and "straddled" by a Turkish field-gun battery.

Five days after the first violation of the Chanak neutral zone by Turkish forces this boundary was again crossed. This time it was more serious. The zone was entered at four places; at Bairamich in the south, at Chan Bazarkeui and Bigha in the east, and in the north along the shore of the Sea of Marmora. The latter force seized and occupied the town of Karabigha, on the coast within the neutral zone. Once again the Turks were persuaded to withdraw – the persuasion consisting, so far as the coastal force was concerned, of the unexpectedly prompt arrival of British warships cleared for action.

It was obvious that the Turks were becoming less and less inclined to respect a neutral zone established upon their territory by other Powers, and that a conference would have to be held without delay if complications amounting to an outbreak of war were to be averted.

It was fortunate that the British reinforcements arrived at this critical moment. Battleships, cruisers, destroyers,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

and submarines arrived at or passed through the Dardanelles. Their arrival was not lost upon the Turks. Nor was that of the transports which began to arrive daily, to pour troops into the Chanak neutral zone and the territory on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus.

Within a few days the British naval forces in the vicinity amounted to two squadrons of battleships, two cruiser squadrons, a submarine flotilla, and about fifty destroyers. It is an ironic commentary upon the post-war history of the British Navy that Great Britain should have been forced to concentrate so great a naval force 3,000 miles from home a mere seven months after her statesmen had accepted the one-power standard of naval strength in the Washington Naval Treaty.

With the arrival of the British reinforcements Turkish truculence began to modify, and a conference opened at Mudania on October 3rd, 1922.

At Mudania the representatives of the Entente Powers – General Sir Charles Harington of Great Britain, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in Turkey; General Charpy of France; and General Mombelli of Italy – met General Ismet Pasha, Chief-of-Staff to Mustapha Kemal Pasha.

Mudania is a typical tumbledown little Turkish town-let on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmora. The only feasible approach from Constantinople is by sea – a distance of rather over fifty miles. The Royal Navy, therefore, had its part to play in the Mudania Conference in spite of the fact that the negotiators were military leaders on both sides.

All three of the Allied generals arrived at Mudania from Constantinople on board the British flagship H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, and they landed for the conference in Sir Osmond Brock's barge, the three Allied flags making a brave show in the bows.

The Mudania Conference did not have a smooth passage. In the first place, business was held up and

## WAR FEVER

tempers frayed by the failure of the Greek representative to arrive. Finally it was learned that the Greek destroyer which was bringing him to Mudania had run short of coal and had put back to Rodosto, on the other side of the Sea of Marmora. For a Greek destroyer to run short of coal in such circumstances caused little surprise, but whether the shortage was real or fancied was never established. Certainly the Sea of Marmora was at its worst, with a full gale blowing and a nasty steep sea. It is also unlikely that the Greek representative was looking forward to the meeting with the victorious Turks.

The unfortunate representative of the Greek Government was not left for long in the shelter of Rodosto. The British destroyer H.M.S. *Veteran* was sent across the Sea of Marmora at full speed to fetch him. Fetch him H.M.S. *Veteran* did, but the poor man was in no condition to attend any conference on the evening of his arrival. A destroyer at full speed in rough weather is not the most comfortable form of travel.

Thus it was Thursday, October 5th, before the Mudania Conference could really get down to work. The session was short and stormy. Ismet Pasha announced briefly that, if the Kemalists were not permitted by the Allies to follow up their victories in Anatolia by an immediate invasion of Thrace, they would attack Chanak. This was, in fact, an ultimatum, and it demanded the consideration of the Allied Governments, and the generals hurried back to Constantinople in H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, there to set the wires humming.

Ismet Pasha had fixed the time-limit for his ultimatum at 3.15 the following afternoon – October 6th. For it to reach Mudania before the appointed time the reply would have had to have been received in Constantinople by noon. Noon came, and still there was no reply from London. Wireless messages were sent to Chanak. All the forces there were to “stand to.” A Turkish attack in force was to be expected at any time after 3.15 that



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

afternoon. Fortunately, Ismet Pasha did not carry out his threat of immediate attack. The reply from London arrived shortly before 2 p.m. – it was afterwards established that the delay had been due to a mistake in the cipher message sent to the Cabinet – and the Allied generals arrived back at Mudania at 5 p.m. – an hour and three-quarters after the expiry of the ultimatum.

It was later discovered that Ismet Pasha's ultimatum, which had brought the Entente Powers once more to the very edge of war, was nothing but bluff based upon the ill-advised statements of M. Franklin-Bouillon about inter-Allied differences. These statements, which had been given wide publicity in the Press of the Near East, had exceeded the intentions and feelings of the French Government even before Lord Curzon's coup, which had renewed the fraying bonds of the Entente.

Nevertheless, M. Franklin-Bouillon had achieved a separate and secret agreement between France and Kemal, and the Italians were privy to it. As a result, French and Italian troops had been withdrawn from the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and the presence of General Charpy and General Mombelli at Mudania was largely a matter of face-saving. The withdrawal of the French and Italian troops from the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles had, of course, been more than offset by the arrival of the British reinforcements. Ismet Pasha was, however, doing all in his power to accentuate the breach in the Allied front.

The British reply to Ismet's ultimatum was in the nature of diplomatic evasion of the main issue, designed to play for time pending the preparation of alternative proposals worked out by the three Governments in co-operation. These alternative proposals were to come in the form of despatches. On the morning of Sunday, October 8th, the British despatches arrived at Mudania, brought by the destroyer H.M.S. *Warwick* at full speed. The speed proved wasted, however, as it was not until

## WAR FEVER

the evening that the French cruiser *Metz* arrived with the despatches from the Quai d'Orsay.

Most of the following day was occupied in an inter-Allied conference on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. At this conference a protocol was drawn up embodying the alternative suggestions of the Allied Governments. There was also drawn up an ultimatum to be delivered to Ismet Pasha at once if the Turks refused to sign the protocol.

The protocol was delivered to Ismet Pasha that evening. He also temporised, saying that he would have to consult Kemal Pasha, who was then at Angora. A time-limit was set for this consultation, and the Allied generals again returned to Constantinople in H.M.S. *Iron Duke*.

There were no very sanguine hopes that the Turks, truculent and flushed with victory as they were, would accede to the suggestions of the Allied Powers. Moreover, steps had to be taken to ensure that, in the event of a Turkish refusal to sign the protocol, the terms of the ultimatum were capable of being immediately and effectively enforced. These terms consisted largely of the bombardment of certain positions known to be held by Turkish troops. Not one of the Entente Powers contemplated military action, which might well involve a costly and difficult invasion of Anatolia. While waiting for the Turkish reply, therefore, the warships anchored in the Bosphorus laid in extra ammunition for their guns – mostly shrapnel shell.

Early in the afternoon of October 10th General Sir Charles Harington again went to Mudania. This time he went in the cruiser H.M.S. *Carysfort*. He was to receive the Turkish reply – a decision which meant peace or war. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that he left Constantinople seething with excitement and a prey to all manner of wild rumours.

It was not until the following day that H.M.S. *Carysfort* returned from Mudania. The Mudania Convention had

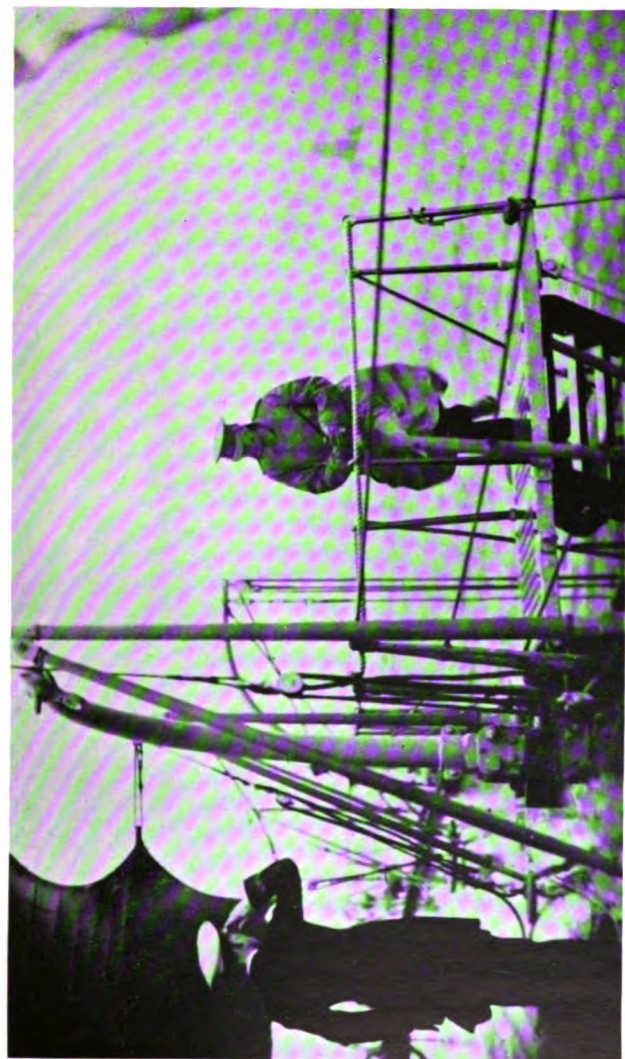
## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

been signed at 6.40 that morning and was to come into force at midnight.

The Mudania Convention was a purely temporary military agreement, to hold good until a peace conference should settle all the intricate points at issue. It provided for the Turkish occupation of Constantinople and Eastern Thrace westwards as far as the River Maritza – the river which to-day forms the frontier between Greece and Turkey in Europe. The Turks were also to have Adrianople. Along the Maritza Valley there was to be established a neutral zone which would be “out of bounds” to both Turks and Greeks. The portion of Thrace thus delivered to Turkey was to be policed by an inter-Allied force, consisting of two British battalions, two French battalions, and one Italian battalion, while the Greeks were evacuating. As soon as the Greek evacuation was completed the Turks were to be allowed to send 8,000 Turkish *gendarmes* into Thrace by way of Constantinople, but no other Turkish forces were to cross into Europe until after the Peace Conference.

Thus the Kemalists got the major portion of what they wanted, although some delay action was imposed.

As soon as the terms of the Mudania Convention became known, Constantinople broke into a riot of flags, among which, rather surprisingly, the Union Jack was much in evidence.



Mudania – General Sir Charles Harington comes on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*  
from the Mudania Conference



## CHAPTER V

### ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

Patrols and refugees – flight of a Sultan – fiddling at Lausanne – no leave for naval personnel – Smyrna alarm – mines and Bolshevik submarines – Lausanne again – evacuation of Constantinople

WHEN NATIONS HAVE BEEN AS CLOSE to armed hostilities as they were at the beginning of October 1922, and when war has been narrowly averted by the signing of an armistice or convention, one might expect swift and strong reaction towards peace. Not so in the Near East. New-found creeds of ultra-nationalism were too strong. Dictators do not relish formulæ. They require stronger meat. Mustapha Kemal was unconsciously pointing the way which has been successfully followed by both Mussolini and Hitler.

The Convention of Mudania certainly provided a breathing-space. So far as the Entente Powers were concerned, it lifted the major responsibility from the shoulders of harassed admirals and generals, and transferred it to diplomats and statesmen. It was very far, however, from making an end of the Near Eastern tension.

If anybody thought that the signing of the Mudania Convention meant an end to the stream of British treasure and perspiration which was being poured into the Near East, they were sadly mistaken.

The lull lasted less than four weeks, and during the whole of those four weeks some, at least, of the Mudania signatories were circling suspiciously around one another like fighting-cocks looking for an opening.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

They were weeks full of comings and goings and hard work for the British Navy. Greece, staggering from the blow of defeat in Anatolia, had lapsed into chaos, politely called a constitutional crisis. In the circumstances the Greek evacuation of Eastern Thrace, instead of being an orderly and highly organised movement going forward steadily under the protection of the inter-Allied *gendarm-erie*, was alternately a myth and a panic-stricken rout.

The ships of the Royal Navy found themselves on many occasions forced to aid in evacuating refugees. The calls came from all along the Thracian coast of the Sea of Marmora and the Ægean. More often than not the work had to be done in open boats. Difficult work, too, at that time of year, since most of the coastal towns boasted no harbours, and their landing-places were crumbling ruins. It entailed a great deal of labour – always cheerfully undertaken. Many were the hours British sailors spent scrubbing out boats after having used them all day long for the transport of refugees and their dirty belongings. The standard of cleanliness set by the Royal Navy was maintained, whatever the obstacles placed in its way by circumstances.

That such work was always cheerfully undertaken deserves the greater praise because the men often felt that they were only helping the luckless refugees to escape from the frying-pan into the fire. Greece did not want to be encumbered at that time with a number of hungry mouths. That had become clear after the evacuation of Smyrna. Greek refugees had been transported from Smyrna to Piræus in chartered merchant-ships under armed guards provided by the British Navy. Conditions on board had been bad, but the refugees and their naval guards believed that they would have to be endured only for the short passage across the Ægean. They were mistaken.

A typical case was that of the S.S. *Karnak*. She had, under stress of circumstances, been grossly overcrowded

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

with refugees, many of whom were injured or burnt. On arrival at Piræus the British naval lieutenant in charge found that no arrangements had been made for the reception of the refugees, the arrival of whom was, apparently, deeply resented by the officials. Only after days of cajoling did he succeed in getting authority to disembark the refugees from a ship the condition of which had already become an offence to civilisation. Even when disembarkation was at last authorised, officials went out of their way to conduct matters in the most brutal manner. An old woman, so badly burnt that her skin was hanging in shreds, was deliberately bumped on every step of the companion ladder as she was carried down it. On many of the steps she left portions of her skin and flesh.

The officers and men of the British warships employed in the Near East knew of these incidents, as they knew of the Greek refugee camps in which starvation and disease went unheeded. But they carried on. There was, of course, always the hope that things might be better by the time the next batch of refugees reached their own country. Moreover, there was the inspiration provided by Lady Rumbold, the wife of the British High Commissioner at Constantinople, whose efforts on behalf of the refugees were indefatigable.

There was humour as well as tragedy in the Near East during those weeks. Rafet Pasha, appointed by Kemal to be Governor of Eastern Thrace, arrived in Constantinople on October 18th. The first contingent of the Kemalist *gendarmérie* was expected at the same time. Constantinople became a blaze of colour by way of celebration. Flags of every known, and dozens of unknown, nationalities were hung out in the streets. One old Armenian tobacconist, determined not to be outdone, searched his attic and dusted the decorations which he had used when celebrating – to order – much publicised German and Turkish victories during the Great War. The result was a shop front gaudily arrayed with outsize



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

and highly coloured portraits of the ex-Kaiser, the ex-Crown Prince Wilhelm, and the ex-Emperor Francis Joseph. When he was told to remove these signs of facile loyalty it turned out that he had not the remotest idea of why he was decorating his shop.

Rafet Pasha had not been in Constantinople for long before he became obstreperous. It must have been galling for him, the representative of the victor, to have to play second fiddle, in the city then still regarded as the Turkish capital, to an Inter-Allied Council, while the ponderous machinery of a peace conference was put into creaking motion. Tact, however, was not Rafet Pasha's long suit. Matters got worse and worse, and finally he so far forgot himself as to be downright rude at a meeting of the Allied generals. The effect of incivility upon a body which has remained in being for years through the constant exercise of tact and politeness may be imagined.

The merest whisper of friction among the various forces purporting to control Constantinople gave encouragement to the many lawless factions in the city. The situation rapidly became one in which a show of force was required. On November 9th the personnel of the Royal Navy again took to the land.

Early that morning all the British men-of-war in the Bosphorus landed a large proportion of their seamen. All Royal Marine detachments and bands were also landed. Thus, while the mists of morning still shrouded the secrets of Stamboul, several thousand men, armed and equipped, assembled at Betchik Tashe, nearly three miles up the Bosphorus from the Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn.

With bayonets fixed and bands playing, the column, which must have seemed endless in the narrow streets, marched south-westwards, through the suburb of Chickli, to the district of Pera. Through this, the most important and populous part of the city north of the Golden Horn, the column marched twice, passing southwards along the

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

Rue de Pera to what was known by the British forces as "Hell Fire Corner," and back along the Rue de Galata. As if to give point to British pre-eminence in the affairs of Constantinople, the salute was taken at the General Headquarters at Harbie by Sir Osmond Brock and Sir Charles Harington. Constantinople scratched its stubbled pate, had its fez reblocked between a pair of brass flower-pots, and decided to live an orderly life.

Nevertheless, political influences continued to play their part. As a direct result of these an armed guard was sent ashore from H.M.S. *Iron Duke* early on the morning of November 17th. This guard gave protection to the flight of the Sultan Mahommed VI, who was finding that his capital under the governorship of Rafet Pasha was rapidly becoming too hot for him. This seems ironical when one remembers the comparatively recent declarations by the Entente Powers of their intention to deliver Constantinople once more to the keeping of the Sultan.

The Sultan, who had claimed British protection as "Khalif of all the Mussulmans," was surreptitiously removed from Dolma Bagtche Palace and placed on board the battleship H.M.S. *Malaya*, which left the Bosphorus immediately. The whole operation was carried out with the utmost secrecy. Here was the curious phenomenon of a Great Power smuggling away from a country the person who, in its view, was the rightful ruler. The Sultan probably was, however, a source of danger so long as he remained in Constantinople. The realism which so often lies behind British foreign policy was once again manifest.

Thus there came to its end the old and great Ottoman Empire, bearing out in its passing the words:

This is the way the world ends:  
Not with a bang, but a whimper.

The new Turkey, however, was already proving itself

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

a handful. Impatience seems inseparable from strong nationalism. It was not until November 21st that Sir Horace Rumbold left Constantinople for the Peace Conference at Lausanne. Even at that date tempers were becoming frayed at the delay, while the "internationalism" of Constantinople had been added to by the arrival of two more flagships – the American U.S.S. *Pittsburgh* and the battleship *Jaime Primo* of the Spanish Navy.

With the whole question of the future of Turkey and the sea routes between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea transferred to a conference of politicians and diplomats at Lausanne, it might have been thought that the task of the Navy in the Near East was over. Nothing of the kind. Until matters could be settled at Lausanne, British troops continued to hold the neutral zones and British warships continued to support them. The Navy had other tasks. It had to be continually on the watch, through an extensive system of patrols, to guard against any ferrying of Turkish troops from Asia Minor to Europe. The patrols were also required to prevent gun-running, about which there were constant scares. The refugee problem, moreover, was for ever demanding attention at the least convenient moments.

In addition to the activities directly due to the Near East situation, the Royal Navy had to carry out an extensive programme of manœuvres and exercises. These were sadly overdue, having had to be postponed on many occasions owing to more pressing commitments arising out of the "war."

The Naval Treaty of Washington had killed the old "two-power standard" by which the British Navy had so long ensured its supremacy. Instead there was "parity," supplemented by the determination of naval officers that a two-power standard of efficiency should give Britain the naval supremacy denied to her, so far as material was concerned, by the "parity" of Washington.

These factors, and the coming of winter, imposed

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

considerable hardship on the naval personnel. Winter in the Sea of Marmora and the Ægean consists of a series of gales punctuated by periods of dense fog.

A great many of the ships employed in the Near East had been hastily sent out from England. They were units of the Atlantic Fleet, and, as such, their crews were looking forward to the Christmas leave to which they were entitled. But prospects of being home for Christmas gradually died. The Washington Naval Treaty had seen to it that twenty British capital ships were sent to the ship-breakers. Post-war demobilisation and reductions had removed nearly 300,000 men from the naval service. At the approach of Christmas 1922 there were neither ships nor men available to relieve those due to return home for the Christmas leave period.

It was a situation from which the British Government might well have taken warning. It was the first demonstration of the fact that the British Navy had commitments so great that the acceptance of a "parity" standard and greatly reduced numbers, both of ships and men, must mean denuding one station for the reinforcement of another in the event of trouble. It was also the first post-war demonstration that a policy of undermanning the Navy must impose hardship upon the personnel.

The British Government, however, was wedded to those twin enemies of security – excessive disarmament and economy. It was the beginning of the period in which politics decreed that the workers ashore must be humoured at every turn, while nothing need be done to ameliorate the lot of members of the fighting services. True, the naval pay had been adjusted to post-war levels, but the new rates had only been secured by the threats to the Cabinet of mutiny in the fleet and resignation of the Board of Admiralty.

The Government ignored the lessons of this initial post-war trouble in the Near East. There was at least the justification that a simultaneous flare-up in two different

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

parts of the world was at that time unlikely. It is one of the tragedies of the post-war history of the British Empire that the lessons of the Near East in 1922-3 continued to be ignored. Policies based upon the theory of "trouble only in one area at one time" were continued long after events had ceased to justify them. Hardships imposed upon the personnel by continued undermanning, so far from being eradicated, became progressive.

If the lessons of the Near East were lost upon the British Government, they were certainly not ignored abroad. Realisation that the British Navy would be able to deal faithfully with only one area, if trouble should arise, created an entirely new situation. Appreciation of this new situation marked a turning-point in history. The prestige of the Royal Navy, and therefore its ability to implement and assist policy, began to decline. Even at this time, so long ago as 1922, there were beginning to grow up influences which showed themselves unmistakably during the Italo-Abyssinian War, and which are responsible for the serious situation still ruling in the Mediterranean.

Had the fleet in Near Eastern waters been able to sense the beginnings of declining influence, its lot would have been even harder. As it was, officers and men put the best possible face upon discomfort and loss of leave and carried on. The Commander-in-Chief in his flagship, H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, did succeed in snatching Christmas at his base at Malta – but only just. He reached Malta on December 23rd. On the evening of December 27th Sir Osmond Brock was at a dance when he received a telegram which sent him and his flagship hurrying back to the Dardanelles. Mustapha Kemal, tired of the long-drawn-out negotiations at Lausanne, was threatening to attack the Dardanelles neutral zones and invade Thrace.

The beginning of February 1923 saw a break-up of the Lausanne Conference. The Turks had gone as far as they could in the light of their new strength and nationalism, but still the Allied Powers demanded more.

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

The result was a renewal of the Turkish threats to occupy the neutral zones – a repetition of the situation which had arisen before the signing of the Mudania Convention in October, and which had brought the Commander-in-Chief back from Malta at the end of December. This time, however, the Turkish threat was accompanied by an insolent “invitation” to the Allies to withdraw their warships from Smyrna before sunset on February 7th.

At Constantinople there was a hasty conference of the Allied admirals on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. It appeared that the general situation in the Near East was worse than it had been before the meeting of the Lausanne Conference. One thing, however, was clear: the Allied navies could not accept this ultimatum from the Turks. So far as the Royal Navy was concerned, the reply to the Turkish orders closing the port of Smyrna to all warships of over 1,000 tons was the immediate arrival at that port of the light cruiser H.M.S. *Curaçoa*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Wilmot Nicholson. The cruiser was, within a few hours, supported by the battleship H.M.S. *Resolution*.

These measures flouting the Turkish ultimatum were not taken without considerable anxiety. There was danger of mines, and minesweepers actually swept a channel ahead of the British warships when they entered the gulf. Turkish minelaying in the Gulf of Smyrna gave the naval authorities much anxiety during the ensuing three weeks. On one occasion the Turks actually attempted to “bottle up” H.M.S. *Resolution* by laying mines between her anchorage and the open sea. Another anxiety, which turned out to be founded only upon rumour, was submarines. Russia was still the bogey, and was giving active support to Kemal. There were persistent reports of Russian submarines creeping down the Bosphorus to assist the Turks against the Allies.

At Smyrna the British warships were constantly “on a split yarn” – the naval translation of *qui vive*. Guns were kept cleared for action. At night searchlights were

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

kept trained upon the shore. Every day seaplanes carried out reconnaissance flights.

Strong measures, and the threat of stronger, again brought the Turks to their senses. By February 27th the Smyrna alarm had subsided and the incident was regarded as closed. The British warships withdrew to other spheres of usefulness, leaving, as before the threat to close the port, only the light cruiser H.M.S. *Calypso* in the Gulf of Smyrna to act as guardship.

For some time Near Eastern affairs drifted on in deadlock. In the middle of March diplomatic negotiations were reopened by a Turkish note to the Allies. As a result it was decided that, in the first place, the Allied Powers were to confer among themselves on the thorny question of the straits. These conversations were to be held in London, after which the Lausanne Conference would be reopened, this time for the discussion of only those questions – notably the presence and passage of warships through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus – upon which the Conference had broken down.

Suspended animation characterised Constantinople until the end of March. The decisions of the Allies were then communicated to Angora. After considering the Allied proposals *in camera* for three days, the Turkish Assembly rejected them. The situation was not eased by the publication in the *Telved* – the Angora newspaper – of an article averring that Mustapha Kemal was indifferent as to whether the final outcome of the negotiations was peace or war with the Entente Powers.

A battle of notes ensued, which continued until April 23rd, when the interrupted Lausanne Conference was resumed. The determination of Great Britain to end the intolerable situation in the Near East, which was involving the retention in that part of the world of a large standing army and the greater part of the British Navy, was strengthened from an unexpected quarter. Afghanistan announced that, in view of the treaty recently concluded

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

between that country and Turkey, if the speedy conclusion of peace with Turkey were delayed by Great Britain, Afghanistan would consider the Anglo-Afghan pact automatically dissolved.

This was a matter of the greatest importance to Great Britain. The Bolsheviks had signed a treaty with Afghanistan in February 1921, and the British Government once more saw the shadow of the Russian bear over the North-west frontier of India.

Outside pressure and Treasury protests against the continued expense in the Near East kept the second Lausanne Conference alive in spite of many threats. Even so, it appeared, to the men in the Near East, to be dragging interminably. There was not an officer or man in the British forces who was not heartily sick of service in that part of the world, yet, even when agreement seemed at last in sight, they had to continue patrolling, carrying out bombardment practices, and exercising emergency landing-parties in order to be at the peak of efficiency in case a sudden breakdown at Lausanne should plunge Great Britain into war. Finally, by dint of concession after concession on the part of Great Britain, the Treaty of Lausanne and Straits Convention were signed. By that time July was more than half over.

The anxiety to disperse the British naval forces in the Near East was demonstrated by the fact that the Seventh Destroyer Flotilla left the Bosphorus for home on the very next day. Several other ships also left the Near East, but the main force of the fleet had to remain, as the treaty had not been ratified by the National Assembly at Angora.

This formality was completed on August 24th, 1923, and was greeted with joyful relief by all ranks in the British forces, for it meant that the evacuation was to begin immediately, and that all Allied forces were to be clear of Turkey by October 5th. The battleship H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign* and another flotilla of destroyers sailed for home that same day.



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

If further proof were needed of the anxiety of the naval personnel to get away from the neighbourhood of Constantinople, it was provided by the crew of H.M.S. *Iron Duke* four days later, when coaling before sailing for Malta. The ship took in 1,100 tons of coal at a rate of nearly 375 tons an hour – the world's record for coaling in that class of ship.

From the moment of ratification by Turkey, transports began to pour out of the ports of the occupied area. On the day of the ratification four transports left: *Hecuba* with part of the 3rd Hussars; *Ekaterinoslav* with the remainder of the 3rd Hussars and some artillery; *Egypt* with the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment; and *Syria* with the Headquarters, 19th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, and three batteries.

The British evacuation of Turkey was divided into three phases. The second phase began on September 3rd. On that day the 1st Battalion the Buffs, and the 6th Medium Battery Royal Garrison Artillery, left Constantinople. In the next three days the following units of the British Army of Occupation left the Near East: the 1st Battalion the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the 1st Battalion the Irish Guards, and several batteries of artillery, companies of the Royal Engineers, and details of the Royal Army Service Corps. It is true to say, as it was after the British concentration in the Mediterranean consequent upon the Italo-Ethiopian dispute twelve years later, that the British public had no conception of the strength of the concentration until the time came for it to be withdrawn.

The second phase of the military withdrawals coincided with the naval withdrawals from Smyrna. The first withdrawals from this port of many contentions were – understandably – those of the Italian Navy. Their units left the gulf on September 1st and 2nd; the remainder of the Allied warships left on September 3rd.

The initial movements of the military evacuation saw

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

the withdrawal of most of the units of the Atlantic Fleet which had been serving in Near Eastern waters for almost a year. At long last an end had been put to their service in the Near East, which had dragged on from month to month through three periods when they would normally have been at their home ports and their crews on leave. They had carried out their many thankless tasks with cheerfulness and success, but they were exceedingly glad to say farewell to the arid bluffs commanding the Dardanelles.

Most of the units of the Mediterranean Fleet remained in Near Eastern waters until the Allied evacuation was completed. This was on October 2nd, 1923, and was carried out with due ceremony.

On October 1st all buildings in Constantinople occupied by the Allied forces were formally handed over to the Turks. These included the British Headquarters and the Harbie Barracks. The Turks who were to take over the buildings saluted the Allied flags as the last detachments marched out. On the following afternoon detachments of Turkish troops and the last Allied troops to leave formed a hollow square on the open quay between the Dolma Bagtche Palace and the Validé Mosque. The British detachment at the ceremony was provided, fittingly, by the Brigade of Guards.

Punctually at three o'clock in the afternoon the three Allied Governors, accompanied by General Saleh ed Din Adil Pasha, the Turkish Military Governor of Constantinople, entered the square and took up their positions in front of the mosque. The flags of the Allies – Great Britain, France and Italy – were then brought to the centre of the square. The bands played the three national anthems and honours were rendered by the Turkish detachment. Then the Turkish flag was brought to the centre of the square and honoured by the Allied detachments to the strains of the new Turkish "Hymn of Independence."

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

This done, the Allied generals bade farewell to the Turkish Military Governor, and they, and the detachments of their troops, embarked immediately in the transports waiting in the Bosphorus. The protocol of evacuation was signed then and there on board S.S. *Arabic* by General Sir Charles Harington, the French and Italian generals, and the Turkish Military Governor.

The transports sailed at once, leaving Constantinople, after four years of Allied occupation, in the undisputed possession of the Turkish Nationalists. Only in the Bosphorus there still lay the light cruiser H.M.S. *Comus* and the destroyers H.M.S. *Wolverine* and H.M.S. *Witherington*, which remained for a few weeks to see that justice was done to British interests. Thus, with pomp and ceremony and mutual compliments, there came to an end the British commitments in Turkish waters.

It has been said that this was received with heartfelt gratitude by all concerned. Certainly it extricated Great Britain from a situation which was becoming increasingly irksome and expensive. Subsequent events, however, tempt one to regard the whole process leading up to the evacuation as having set a dangerous precedent. Mustapha Kemal Pasha had succeeded in obtaining, through the medium of Lausanne, practically everything which he had set himself to gain. These gains, moreover, were those which two-thirds of the British Navy and a large proportion of the British Army had been mobilised to prevent.

It may be said that events are inexorable – that had we not acceded to the Turkish demands at Lausanne we should have been committed to far worse responsibilities. That may very well be, but there is no denying that here, for the first time in history, was a dictator gaining his ends in the teeth of the power of Britannia. Ataturk, as he is now called, was the first. He was not to be the last.

## CHAPTER VI

### ADRIATIC ALARM

Redrawing the map of Europe – the Janina murders – Italy occupies Corfu – Mussolini's first brush with the League – Colossus of Rome – humiliation of Greece – the Malta language dispute

FOUR DAYS AFTER the ratification of the Lausanne Treaty by the Angora Assembly, and more than a month before Great Britain was free of her commitments in Constantinople and at the Dardanelles, trouble flared up in another part of the Mediterranean naval command.

Once again the trouble was due to the growing-pains inevitably connected with the drawing of the post-war map of Europe. On this occasion it was literally a matter of map-drawing. An Italian frontier commission was engaged in demarcating the boundary between Greece and Albania.

Italy was vitally concerned with this frontier. There was a vast difference between the part which the Italian General Tellini was playing upon the frontier and the part played by the British Colonel Clifford at the Wal-Wal frontier incident, which so nearly plunged the world into war some years later. The difference lay, not where the frontier was being determined in the interior, but in Italy's interest in the indented coastline and many harbours of the east coast of the Adriatic.

This was only the first year of the Fascist regime – a year concerned almost entirely with internal affairs and the seemingly perennial problem of Fiume. At that time the 500-mile-long arm of the Mediterranean between Italy and Dalmatia and the Ionian Peninsula represented the extent of any Italian claim to a *mare clausum*. One of the first ambitions of the new Fascist Italy was

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

concerned with the domination of the Adriatic Sea. The much-contested port of Fiume lay at its head. One side of its entrance from the Mediterranean proper – the Straits of Otranto – was held by Italy, the other by Greece – a country unloved because of her usurpation of Italy's claims in Smyrna.

An Italian Frontier Commission working between Greece and Albania was, therefore, far more the concern of the new patriotic Italy than is generally the case with such missions.

On August 28th, 1923, members of the Italian Frontier Commission were motoring from Janina to a place called Sante Quaranta, close to the frontier, when the motor-car was ambushed as it crossed the marshes of the Epirus, some thirty-two miles from Janina.

All five of the occupants of the motor-car were murdered. They consisted of General Tellini, President of the Italian Commission for the Determination of the Greco-Albanian Frontier; Major Scorti, a medical officer of the Italian Army; Lieutenant Conati, aide-de-camp; an interpreter, and a chauffeur.

This outrage was, in itself, bad enough. There was, however, grave danger of its being magnified into an international incident of the most inflammable Sarajevo type. It had taken place on Greek territory, and there existed between the two countries a jealousy which, had Greece at that time been strongly nationalistic, would have proved most dangerous. Even as it was, the repercussions of the Janina murders, as they came to be called, were sufficiently dangerous. Two factors, however, conspired, mercifully, to damp down their effect. In Italy, Fascism, newly installed, had its hands full with a vast programme of internal reorganisation. Greece had not yet recovered from the blow dealt her in Anatolia by Mustapha Kemal Pasha. In addition, she was pre-occupied with internal troubles and the problem of the Thracian refugees.

## ADRIATIC ALARM

The Janina murders sounded a new and clanging alarm to the precarious peace of Europe. Mussolini, actuated by the wave of indignation which swept through Italy at the outrage, and mindful always of the need of the new Fascist regime for prestige and a show of strength and firmness, in contrast to the corrupt vacillation of his predecessors in office, immediately sent strong demands to the Greek Government. These demands included, apart from apology, funeral rites for the murdered men; salute to the Italian flag; an indemnity of 50,000,000 Italian lire, to be paid within five days; a full inquiry with the help of the Italian military attaché, also to be conducted in five days; and capital punishment for all found guilty.

Greece was exhausted after her disastrous war in Asia Minor, and her internal affairs, under stress of political crises and the ever-growing problem of the Thracian refugees, were chaotic. The raising of a cash indemnity of the value demanded was, to Greece, quite impossible in the short time available. Moreover, Greece was hardly in a position to carry out, within five days, a searching inquiry designed to bring the murderers to book. It was more than likely that the perpetrators of the crime were a group of the bandits indigenous to the wild country in close proximity to the imperfectly defined frontier. Any serious attempt at their apprehension would have entailed extensive and difficult military operations quite incapable of being brought to a successful conclusion in a mere five days.

Under the circumstances, Greece tendered a reply which was both conciliatory and honest. It was pointed out that the Italian demands as regards both the inquiry within the time-limit and the indemnity were impossible of fulfilment. Since the apprehension of the murderers within five days was deemed impossible, and, indeed, could never be guaranteed, Greece also declined to pledge her word that they would suffer capital punishment. On

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the other hand, Greece acceded to the Italian demands for full apology, funeral honours for the victims, and for acts of obeisance before the Italian flag.

Mussolini's reply was in keeping with that which we have since come to regard as characteristic. He replied by taking the law into his own hands and resorting to force. The bulk of the Italian Navy had already been concentrated in the Gulf of Taranto, ostensibly for the purpose of carrying out large-scale gunnery and torpedo exercises. On the morning of August 31st, 1923, the fleet sailed from Taranto under sealed orders. At 4.50 that afternoon a powerful squadron of the Italian Navy arrived off Corfu, the chief town of the large island of that name, which lies off the Greek coast just to the south of the Straits of Otranto.

Ten minutes' notice was given to the British Consul before the Italian warships commenced bombardment. No warning whatever was given to the Greek authorities. The actual bombardment did not last long, for the Greek authorities surrendered immediately. Nevertheless, both the forts guarding the harbour were hit, as was also a school. Neither of the forts were "in commission," and the more important one was being used to house some thousands of refugee women and children and several hundred Armenian orphans under the care of the fund sponsored by the Lord Mayor of London. Among these there were several casualties. Thus the action of the Italian warships antagonised at a stroke the forces of humanity, international law, and public opinion in Great Britain.

After the bombardment, Italian marines and troops were landed. These occupied the island and took possession.

On the same day Mussolini sent a note to the Italian representatives abroad "in order fully to explain Italy's action towards Greece." This note announced the landing of Italian troops at Corfu. It continued:

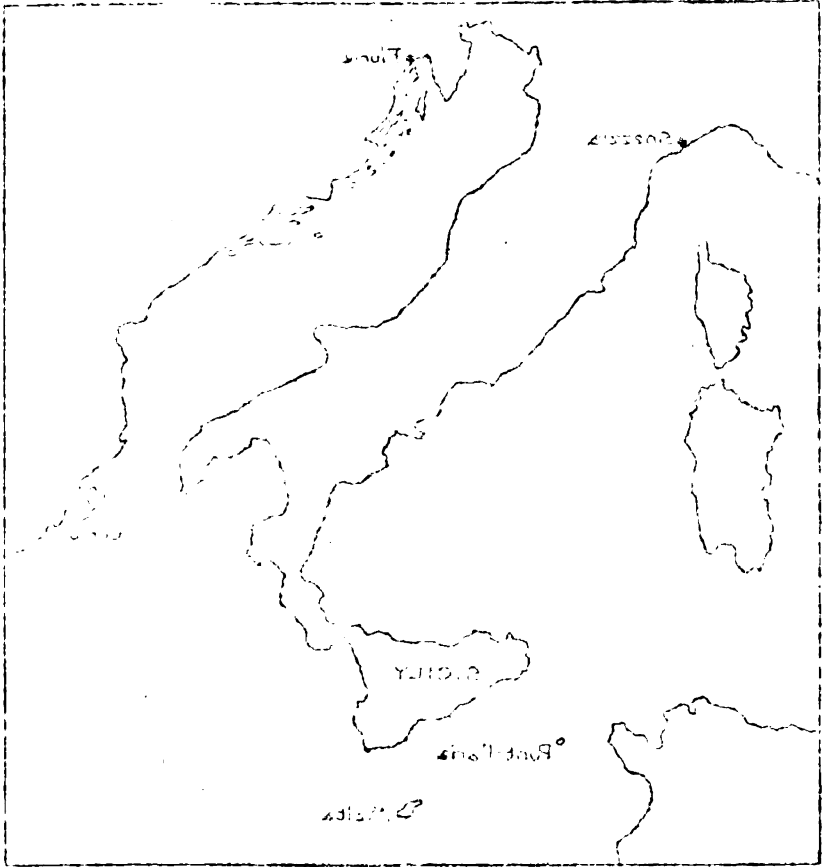
"By this purely temporary measure Italy does not

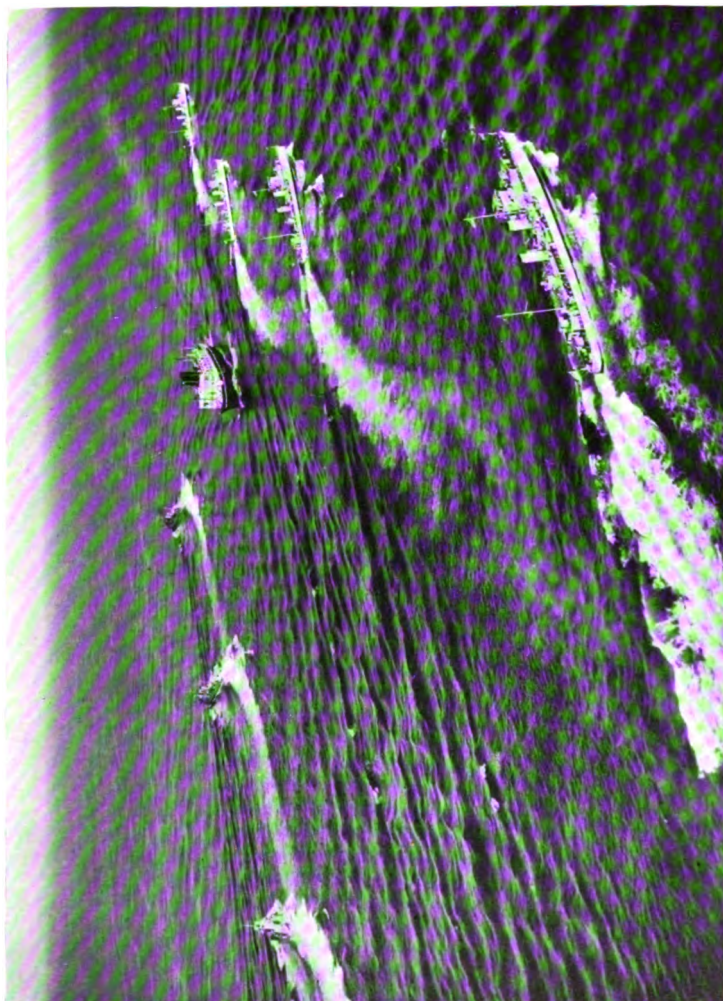
The map shows the Italian peninsula and its surrounding islands. The word "Italy" is written across the top. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances from 0 to 100 miles. Key locations marked with dots and labels are Spezzia (on the northwest coast), Fiume (in the northeast), Corfu (in the Ionian Sea), Pontellaria (off the west coast of Sicily), and Malta (south of Sicily). The island of Sicily is labeled "SICILY". The map also shows parts of France to the west and Greece to the east.

For a few days, all of us were meeting the *S. J. 1750* at *Indra* with K. Making the new board and putting up after getting away from



Map 2





Escort for a new king – destroyers meeting the S.S. *Viceroy of India* with King Farouk, the new king of Egypt, on board, and turning up into station as escorts



## ADRIATIC ALARM

intend to commit an act of war, but simply to maintain her prestige and show her inflexible intention to enforce the reparations due to her in accordance with the customs and rights of peoples.

"The Italian Government expresses the hope that Greece will not by any action whatsoever modify, or cause to be modified, the pacific nature of this precaution."

But, while Italy insisted on regarding her action as the "taking of a pledge," the bombardment and occupation of the territory of another nation was rightly regarded by the rest of the world as an act of war. "There can be no two opinions as to the extremely serious character of this step, or of the very grave nature of the consequences which may follow it," wrote *The Times* in a leading article headed "Signor Mussolini's Mistake."

*The Times*, while finding Mussolini guilty, showed appreciation of the forces acting upon the Italian dictator. "The temptation . . . to a leader of his temperament and position is manifest. He is a masterful man, and he has led the Italian masses to expect that he will show himself to be masterful abroad as well as at home. They have long cherished enmity towards Greece, and there can be little doubt that, for the present, any exhibition of vigour against her will be frantically applauded in the streets and in the greater portion of the Press."

Greece refused to be drawn into a new war which, in the then state of the country, could hardly fail to be disastrous. She appealed to the League of Nations. The League Council was in session and the Assembly was due to meet within a few days.

This was Mussolini's first brush with the League of Nations, and on this occasion he found himself faced with the opposition of a League the machinery of which was already in motion and did not require ponderous and lengthy starting.

The prophetic nature of the Corfu incident is striking.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Italy was ranged for the first time against the League. British opinion at once began to toy with the idea of sanctions against Italy. *The Times* pointed out that the League provided for "the application of certain very stringent sanctions to any member of the League who may resort to war until three months after the report and in disregard of its covenants."

Those responsible for guiding the policy of Great Britain were in something of a quandary. Great Britain was bound to Italy by ties which, in 1923, were still strong. On the other hand, she had until recently been aiding and abetting Greece, and she was bound to support the League of Nations. England, moreover, had given guarantees of the neutrality of Corfu when the island had been ceded to Greece in 1864. To these complications must be added the factor which so often determines the course of British foreign policy – expediency in view of the security of British interests. Great Britain certainly did not wish to see the Adriatic transformed into an Italian lake, the mouth of which lay a bare 300 miles from the main trade route to Port Said and the East.

The effect upon the British Navy of the Italian occupation of Corfu was more moral than material. Ships were not rushed to the Adriatic, nor did they "stand by" at Malta for immediate action. The Corfu incident was adjudged, because of its implications and its reference to the League of Nations, as one to be settled by the diplomats. Moreover, any naval demonstration might well have made matters worse by accenting any cleavage with Italy. Nor were ships available.

The ships of the Mediterranean Fleet were, almost to a keel, still holding a watching brief in the Near East. Constantinople, Chanak, and Smyrna claimed all the Mediterranean Fleet except the battleships *Benbow* and *Ajax* and five destroyers, which were at Malta. H.M.S. *Benbow* was refitting in the dockyard and was not due to complete until the middle of October, and H.M.S. *Ajax*

## ADRIATIC ALARM

was under orders to leave for Devonport to recommission. One of the destroyers, H.M.S. *Sportive*, was also in dockyard hands. The concentration of the Atlantic Fleet in Eastern Mediterranean waters had already been dispersed. The only Atlantic Fleet ship remaining in the Mediterranean was the battleship H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*, and she was due to leave for Sheerness.

Thus it was immediately demonstrated by the Italian action at Corfu that the British Fleet normally in the Mediterranean was not of sufficient strength to deal with two simultaneous and separated crises.

Contemplation of the head of the new regime in Italy as the Colossus of Rome straddling the entrance to the Adriatic did not appeal to British naval opinion. In the Royal Navy the Mediterranean Command was regarded as a whole, bounded only by the coasts of the mainland of Europe, Africa, and Asia. This conception was far from subscribing to the narrower view of to-day – that British naval responsibility is concerned almost solely with the safety of the great trade route running from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Suez Canal. It visualised all the watery indentations of the Mediterranean coastline as a British responsibility, if not actually as British territory. This applied to the Adriatic, to the Ægean, the Sea of Marmora, the Black Sea, and even penetrated into Central Europe by means of the navigable waters of the Danube, where gunboats flying the White Ensign had patrolled for nearly four years.

This conception of British naval supremacy had received a rude shock in the Near East. The Lausanne Conference and the Straits Convention had mortified the great eastern limb of the responsibility of the British Mediterranean Fleet. The amputation was even then being carried out by the evacuation of Constantinople and Chanak. The operation had become necessary by reason, in the first place, of the encouragement given to Greece by the British Government under Mr. Lloyd

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

George. The Italian coup at Corfu threatened the lopping off from the British sphere of naval influence of the other major indentation on the north side of the Mediterranean, and again Greece was intimately concerned.

Was the British Navy really falling back upon the defence of the Mediterranean trade route only? That was the question asked by naval officers. It was asked with anxiety, for the men concerned knew well enough that withdrawal from any one of the limbs of the Mediterranean would make attack upon its centre easier both to prepare and to accomplish. There was also considerable puzzlement in the Navy as regards the policy of the Home Government. Politics are not the province of naval officers, but, in so far as naval officers are necessarily the instruments of policy, a close understanding of the aims of policy is, to say the least, desirable.

The Navy had grown accustomed to a policy which involved the support of Greece; a policy over which both the British Government and its naval servants had burned their fingers, and one which began a long process of alienation of sympathy which has culminated in a serious threat to the peace of Europe. Over the Corfu incident, however, British policy shifted its ground suddenly and completely, and a British warship was detailed to take part, astern of Italian warships, in one of the most humiliating episodes in the history of the Greek Navy.

On September 19th, 1923, the remains of the murdered Italians were taken, with full military honours, on board an Italian cruiser at Prevesa, the Greek port some fifty miles south of Corfu. On the same day the Italian battleships *Conte di Cavour* and *Giulio Cesare* steamed into Phaleron Bay close to Piræus, the port of Athens. They were escorted by six Italian destroyers, and aircraft flew overhead. All the Italian warships were cleared for action and their crews were at their guns. Astern of the Italian battleships followed, in the rôle of witnesses, the British light cruiser H.M.S. *Cardiff* and the French cruiser

## ADRIATIC ALARM

*Mulhouse* (the one-time German cruiser *Stralsund*). In the bay lay the Greek battleship *Kilkis*, the armoured cruiser *Georgios Averoff*, and four destroyers.

Under the threat of the Italian gun muzzles, the Greek warships flew the Italian flag at the masthead while the guns of the *Kilkis* and *Averoff* fired a salute to the Italian colours. Thus were the Janina murders wiped out by naval obeisance at Phaleron Bay.

Meanwhile an International Commission was investigating the Janina murders. The British member of this commission was taken to Prevesa from Constantinople in a British destroyer. Corfu, however, was still occupied by the Italians. It was arranged that evacuation should take place on September 27th. On that morning the Italian naval squadron in Corfu harbour weighed anchor and sailed. The Greeks were only beginning to feel a sense of relief when, four and a half hours later, the Italian squadron reappeared and anchored once more. It seemed that Greece had not yet paid over the money agreed upon as compensation for the families of the murdered Italians, and Mussolini did not intend to relax his grip on Corfu until every detail of the settlement had been observed. Two days later, however, Corfu was finally evacuated, Italy leaving only the torpedo-boat *Audace* in the harbour for a few more days as a reminder to Greece of her powerful neighbour. Finally, on October 5th, 1923, Mussolini stated grandiloquently that "the Corfu question is ended."

The world heaved a sigh of relief. Immense damage had, however, been done. Mussolini had gained all that he could possibly have hoped to gain from Greece short of permanent occupation or conquest. The Italian diplomatic victory had swayed British policy. It had, moreover, been achieved by the occupation of territory the neutrality of which was of immense naval importance to Great Britain.

Subsequent events have proved beyond doubt that



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

none of the lessons of the Corfu incident were lost upon the Italian dictator. Nor were they lost upon British naval opinion, and the latter found greater cause for anxiety in the apparent reluctance of the home Government to face the issue. This, shorn of ideology and the roseate haze in which the British Government apparently regarded events in the Mediterranean, was that Mussolini had produced what was virtually a new nation with a strong imperialistic bias; a nation, moreover, being nourished on a belief that it could take what it wanted without begging the leave of any Power.

The Royal Navy certainly recognised this truth long before it was brought home to the British public. This does not argue any exceptional perspicacity on the part of the officers of the British Navy; it was merely that, being on the spot, they could scarcely avoid forming conclusions from events and tendencies with which they found themselves in close proximity.

Malta is the principal base of the Mediterranean Fleet. It was to Malta that the ships went from the Near East during the few opportunities for relaxation. When the evacuation of Constantinople was completed, the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet returned to Malta, there to rest awhile before throwing themselves anew into the interrupted but never-ending quest for efficiency.

There was at Malta at that time a movement which appeared to naval officers in the light of a demonstration of Italian imperialism. This concerned the language question. Malta had recently been granted self-government, which had led to a wave of nationalist feeling among the Maltese. This was exploited by certain interests which desired to see Italian taught as the major language in the schools. The difficulties of combining three languages – English, Maltese, and Italian – in an educational system were manifest. The Letters Patent of the Constitution only served to make confusion worse confounded, for they were so abstruse on

## ADRIATIC ALARM

the language question as to defy clear interpretation. Thus there arose a controversy which was to last for ten years.

It is probably correct to say that the vast majority of the Maltese were intensely loyal to the British Empire, and considered the agitation for the use of the Italian language on the island as utterly divorced from any Italian ideas of imperialism. As in most controversies, however, it was the minority which proved the most vociferous, and which coloured the outlook of the British naval officers stationed at the island.

This impression seemed to be confirmed on the very day on which Mussolini announced that the Corfu incident was closed. In an after-dinner speech in Rome, a Minister of the Malta Government was alleged to have urged the Maltese colony in that city to tell their countrymen to study Italian as their mother tongue; and to have added that Italian was likely to be of great use and help to the Maltese in the near future. Subsequent denial of this speech, which was conveyed to Lord Plumer, Governor of Malta, from Sir Ronald Graham, the British Ambassador in Rome, did little to allay suspicion, particularly as the Minister in question promptly resigned.

Only a few weeks later another event occurred which seemed to point the same way. A Maltese National Association was formed. Such an association would have excited no suspicion and little comment had it not been for the fact that the association, many of the members of which were of Italian parentage, was modelled upon Fascism. Moreover, the members were pledged to uphold the teaching of Italian in the schools on an equal footing to the English language.

At the time there might have seemed some justification for accusing the British officers of hypersensitiveness regarding Italian aims, produced by too close proximity to such problems. Since then, however, events have taken a course which has fully justified the misgivings of the men on the spot.

## CHAPTER VII

### RETROGRESSION

Eight years of peace and retrogression – growing Italian jealousy – economy rules the fleet – the *Hood-Renown* collision – decline of morale – the *Royal Oak* scandal – visit to Constantinople leads to closer Turko-Soviet accord – London Naval Treaty

THE EIGHT YEARS which followed the settlement of the Corfu incident may be characterised as a period of settling down after the upheavals of peace-making. It was also a period of slow deterioration of the influence exerted upon the Mediterranean Powers by the British Navy.

Politically and diplomatically there were played out on the Mediterranean scene during these years acts which were gathering momentum towards the great challenge to British naval supremacy in the middle sea. Simultaneously there were at work within the naval administration, and in the Royal Navy itself, forces making for weakness.

Perhaps the retrogression of those years was inevitable. There was, certainly, excuse for reaction after troubles which had extended for more than five years of official peace. It is difficult, however, to find excuse for the blindness which carried the British Empire to the brink of disaster. Before the challenge to the British Empire was delivered a Minister of the Crown declared that British disarmament had been carried "to the edge of risk." That was certainly no exaggeration, yet for months nothing was done to reduce the danger.

The British Government is, however, a democratic Government. As such it could not act until the great mass of voters had been made to realise that its cherished ideals were dangerous fallacies. This time-lag in the

## RETROGRESSION

adoption of an obviously necessary policy must always put democracy at a disadvantage compared with dictatorship. The former has to manoeuvre in order to make up the minds of the people – being careful that the people think that they have made up their own minds. The dictator has only to make up his own mind and issue an edict.

One is tempted, however, to think that excuses are being stretched beyond the limit of credulity when a dangerous situation is prolonged for a political end. When, after the General Election of 1935, Mr. Baldwin was accused of delaying the British rearmament programme to a dangerous degree, he said frankly that he could think of nothing “which would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain” (than pressing for rearmament before the election). It may be argued that Mr. Baldwin chose the lesser of two evils, but his words remain a striking indictment of the British version of democratic government.

Some blame for the terrible shortage of material at the time of Italy's challenge must be laid at the door of the Admiralty. Naval administration cannot be conducted without money, and the supply is controlled, through the Treasury, by the Government. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that more energy on the part of the Admiralty in pointing out the true state of affairs would have had some effect. No Government could have continued to hold office if the true magnitude of the glaring deficiencies in stores and personnel had been known to Parliament. It was one of those occasions on which the cherished adjective “silent” did the Royal Navy singular disservice. In any case, it would surely have been better to have sacrificed the building of one or two new ships, and to have been sure of having enough men to man the existing ships and sufficient stores to fit them out for active service. This, presumably, could have been done had the Admiralty pressed for it, since

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

it would not have entailed increase in the Estimates. Moreover, the spectacle of a Board of Admiralty voluntarily foregoing the laying of a keel in order to provide for shells, stores, and men, would have given Parliament and the country furiously to think.

During the twelve years prior to the sudden realisation of the National Government that the Empire tottered on the "edge of risk" there arose within the Royal Navy itself influences detrimental to efficiency. A strong and courageous naval administration, in close touch with the trend of events in the Navy, could have rooted out most of these, although they owed their growth to the incessant cry for economy.

The term "return to normal" was frequently used in the Mediterranean after the alarms and excursions which extended up to the latter part of 1923. It seemed an attractive programme, in spite of the fact that "normal" was a term impossible of definition. Since the war there had been no "normal" in the middle sea, and post-war conditions could obviously not be compared with those which had existed prior to 1914. As time went on a "normal" was created. The pity of it was that, through no fault of those serving in that area, it became a sort of narcotic.

The Adriatic alarm at the Italian occupation of Corfu was followed some three months later by the settlement of the great outstanding question of the Adriatic – the ownership of the city and port of Fiume, for the sake of which D'Annunzio had knelt in the roadway before the retiring Italian troops.

Hand in hand with the Fiume settlement there marched a "pact of friendship" between Italy and Yugo-Slavia which had the effect of extending Italian influence in the Adriatic.

That jealousy of Great Britain was flourishing in Italy must have been evident to any close student of international affairs. It had begun when Great Britain,

## RETROGRESSION

ignoring the obligations of the London Treaty of April 1915 and the Pact of St. Jean de Maurienne of two years later, had countenanced and even encouraged the Greek occupation of Smyrna. It had been increased by the action of Great Britain in supporting the League of Nations in its condemnation of Mussolini over the Corfu affair. It was further increased a year later by the fact that the proclamation of Egyptian independence led to a postponement of a settlement of the frontier between Egypt and Italian Libya.

But Italian jealousy of England was, in the decade following the Corfu incident, hidden beneath many other considerations. Mussolini was accomplishing great things in Italy, the administration of which had been a network of corruption and incompetence before his accession to power. Such reforms demanded the major share of the energy and resources of the Fascist regime. What was left went to the settling of outstanding questions elsewhere – Fiume, and the Italian colonies in North Africa.

In the circumstances, the words of Mussolini, written three years before the march on Rome, appeared to be forgotten: "Imperialism is the law of life, eternal and unchanging. At bottom it is nothing but the need, the desire, the will to expand felt by every individual and by every nation with vitality." Yet Mussolini was for ever preaching vitality.

Perhaps they were not entirely forgotten. Perhaps it was hoped to satiate Italy's imperialistic appetite by the tardy cession to her, in 1924, of Jubaland. Perhaps, also, there was more behind the replacement, in the same year, of the old battleships of the Mediterranean Fleet by more modern and powerful units, than the advertised reason that it was better to have coal-burning ships at home and oil-burning ships in the Mediterranean. Yet, if there were reasons of Empire security in this strengthening of the Mediterranean Fleet, it is difficult to reconcile them with the continued and accelerated disarmament.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The strengthening of the British Mediterranean Fleet caused concern in Italy, where the reconstitution of the armed forces was under serious consideration. In February 1924 an English journalist in Rome wrote: "The view of the Italian Admiralty is entirely opposed to the value of capital ships, but they are certainly working for that pre-eminence in submarines and aircraft in the Mediterranean which it is stated that the resources of Italy are adequate to form. It is too early to say that we are on the eve of a competition in a new form of naval armament in the Mediterranean, but this is certainly the impression which I gather here."

Italian feeling against England was subordinated, at this time, to feeling against France. Rivalry between these two Mediterranean Powers overshadowed practically every event in Europe for more than sixteen years after the end of the Great War. It extended from the Danube basin to North Africa, where France continually obstructed the colonial aims of her rival. It continued until Hitler's repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles caused a *volte-face* on the part of France, who then discovered that friendship with Italy was much to be desired.

The rivalry between France and Italy had a direct effect upon the position of the British Navy in the Mediterranean. It progressed from political and diplomatic rivalry to one of arms, and particularly of naval armaments. Even before 1930 it was having a considerable effect upon the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean.

At the end of 1923 the British Mediterranean Fleet was still undergoing a process of transition. Reductions and economy had become the order, but it took time to settle down to this regime after the stirring events of the past years, in which officers had not had to worry about fuel and store allowances, and in which a seaman who dropped a scrubbing-brush while cleaning the ship's side

## RETROGRESSION

had not been haled to the quarterdeck as a minor criminal.

For a time the old spirit of initiative, cultivated by being so often "left in the air" in the Near East, prevailed. Gradually, however, it disappeared, as the officers and men who had served under those conditions were relieved. From England came officers and men already imbued with the new creed, the major tenet of which was economy. From Whitehall came sheaves of orders and regulations, most of which were concerned with economy.

Economy came to rule the fleet both in action and in inaction. More time was spent in harbour. The time in harbour could not, however, be used entirely for training.

It was decreed that ships should make up their own metal polish to an Admiralty recipe. Economy cut down the amount of holystone and shark-skin which was allowed to be consumed. Cotton waste became at a premium, and paint and enamel became as valuable as gold-leaf had been. As a result, more time and ingenuity had to be expended on the routine cleaning of the ships.

Cleanliness remained the watchword, and the rivalry between ships for the honour of looking the smartest grew with the greater proportion of time in harbour. Officers, therefore, became loath to indulge in training exercises which would be liable to dirty the ship. A blemish was a serious matter when the stores for making it good were so hard to come by. The men also were affected. It is impossible to do gun drill or any other training exercise efficiently without putting one's heart into it and forgetting all other considerations. It is also impossible to carry out gun drill, and the rest, without soiling brightwork. With the short rations of improvised cleaning material, soiled brightwork meant hours of disheartening toil. The most striking indictment against this form of naval administration lay in the fact that officers, and even petty officers, were forced to spend a proportion of their hard-earned pay upon cleaning-materials for their ships.



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

One of the chief economies was a drastically reduced allowance of fuel. Not only did this make it necessary for the ships to spend a far greater proportion of their time in harbour, but it made the exercises carried out when the fleet did get to sea, largely unrealistic. In order to keep within the fuel allowance, the speed of ships in a fleet exercise had to be curtailed to the most economical. The full speed of a battleship, the speed at which a fleet action is likely to be fought, is in the neighbourhood of 23 knots. The most economical speed for this type of ship is usually in the neighbourhood of 12 knots. Destroyers have a full speed of over 35 knots, and they would certainly use every ounce of steam if delivering an attack in battle. Their economical speed is under 15 knots.

Efforts were made to render exercises as realistic as possible by scaling down the speeds of the ships in proportion to their type and full speed capabilities. Nevertheless, the artificial conditions, imposed by the need for economy in fuel, eradicated the greater part of the training value of the exercises. Quick thinking and the habit of coming to the right decision in a split second are essential attributes of an efficient naval officer. They are attributes, moreover, which need to be kept "on the top line" by constant practice. Ships doomed to waddle about the ocean at 12 knots when playing at war can neither create nor foster efficiency.

Like most of the economies of those lean years, the small fuel allowance proved in the long run to be false economy. Admiral Sir Barry Domville has some trenchant things to say on this subject in his book *By and Large*: "If you have handled small craft at close quarters at high speeds, you have gained valuable experience and confidence. To one so trained it is a pathetic sight to see big ships bumping one another, with all day to think about it before doing so." The Admiral was obviously alluding to the collision between H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Renown* during manœuvres.

## RETROGRESSION

The two battle-cruisers had been carrying out an inclination estimating exercise. They had been several miles apart and were closing one another. The signal to close had been made by the flagship. It was a signal the strict text-book implication of which entailed a turn away by the flagship as the other vessel came into "station" some 500 yards away. Owing to the large initial distance between the two ships, the manœuvre took a long time. Other things happened in the interval. Finally, the flagship did not turn away, and her consort held on and rammed her. The letter of the text-books had been served, but initiative seemed conspicuously lacking.

Courts martial followed. Admiral S. R. Bailey was acquitted. Captain Sawbridge, of H.M.S. *Renown*, was found guilty of "hazarding his ship," but his conviction was quashed by the Admiralty. Both ships had to dock, and the repairs cost thousands of pounds.

The economy drive, coupled with the congested lists for promotion, was also responsible for the bad training of officers. When even a slight accident with a ship's boat entailed searching inquiries into the extra expense involved, accidents were not lightly to be risked. The more senior officers, if they allowed their juniors to assume responsibility, ran the risk of being held accountable for allowing the expense to be incurred – and that, during the economy era, was the greatest sin in the calendar. Since officers knew that a single "black mark" against their names might cost them their promotion, they became reluctant to delegate responsibility. Yet not one of these officers would have denied that the early assumption of responsibility and the taking of risks are indispensable in the training of young officers.

The most extraordinary feature of the great post-war drive for economy in the Royal Navy is that it produced an enormous increase in paper work. Much of this was concerned with naval stores. Every nut and bolt, every shred of cotton waste, had to be accounted for in triplicate

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

or quadruplicate. The cost of this checking up on the honesty and veracity of the naval personnel must be enormous.

Paper work has not ceased. Rather has it increased. Fortunately, at least one flag officer on the active list is fighting hard against the plethora of quite unnecessary "returns."

Yet even "paper work" produced its own "economy." Envelopes had to be used over and over again, stuck up with what were termed "economy labels." The Admiralty even went so far as to issue envelopes with ungummed flaps, and heavily printed with exhortations to use "economy labels."

The post-war years of "returning to normal" produced in the Royal Navy a new "criminal code" far removed from the old law of "the good of the Service."

Whitehall was well served in its everlasting paper-chase by the new super-staff system and over-specialisation. Never did a situation arise which did not call for "appreciation" on several sheets of foolscap, and the growth of specialisation required new forms and—very nearly—special interpreters of their technical jargon.

The cost of the Admiralty office—the heart of the naval administration—has increased from £483,500 to £1,459,000 since 1914, in a period during which the effective strength of the Royal Navy has decreased by nearly half in the number of warships and by 104,458 in personnel.

Progress is inevitable, but much of this increase is due to the rise of bureaucracy and its attendant handmaidens who wield the typewriter and the duplicator. The pen may have been mightier than the sword in the days of the first Earl of Lytton. Between 1923 and 1935 there seemed to be a growing danger of the typewriter ousting the gun.

Internal organisation based upon economy rather than efficiency; continued faith of the Government in unilateral

## RETROGRESSION

disarmament; precarious careers and reluctance to accept responsibility – everything seemed to be conspiring to reduce the value of the Royal Navy in its own eyes and in the estimation of the world. From home came rumblings of discontent and unmistakable signs of the growth of a spirit of trade unionism in the Service. Orders showed that this spirit was recognised and accepted. Instructions were received that men were only to be called upon to work during specified hours, and that leisure was to be regarded as a right rather than as a sometimes precarious privilege.

A series of external events tended further to decrease the traditional prestige of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean.

In the spring of 1925 King George V and Queen Mary cruised in the Mediterranean in the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert*. The Royal Yacht was escorted throughout the cruise by the destroyers H.M.S. *Vampire* and H.M.S. *Vendetta*. On April 9th the Royal Yacht arrived at Palermo, little more than 250 miles from Malta, where the Mediterranean Fleet was in harbour, expecting a visit from the King and Queen. On that day, however, Sir Osmond Brock, the Commander-in-Chief, received a telegram from the King regretting that it would not be possible for him to visit the Mediterranean Fleet. The Navy knew that the King was convalescing after a serious illness and that the Queen was a bad sailor. Nevertheless, disappointment was increased by realisation that this was the first time the King, himself a naval officer, had not seized an opportunity of visiting his fleet. An event which would have raised morale, which was showing signs of decline, did not take place.

Three years later there occurred in the Mediterranean Fleet a most unsavoury scandal, which did much to lower the prestige of the Royal Navy. This was the notorious *Royal Oak* case.

The incident had its beginnings long before the scandal

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

broke upon the world. H.M.S. *Royal Oak* was the flagship of the Rear-Admiral of the Mediterranean Battle Squadron. Rear-Admiral B. St. G. Collard was an officer of the old school – a magnificent seaman with no use for incompetence, and a quick temper. Admiral Collard had as his flag-captain Captain K. G. B. Dewar, who, after his retirement, stood as a Labour candidate for Parliament. The commander was Commander H. M. Daniel, who afterwards joined the staff of the *Daily Mail*. After his retirement, naval opinion was profoundly shocked by the exhibition of his sword in a shop window as an advertisement for a fountain pen, with the legend, "The pen is mightier than the sword."

These three officers never "got on" together. Had the state of affairs in H.M.S. *Royal Oak* been known to higher authority, early action could have been taken, and the Navy would have been well served by the dispersal of this little group of incompatible temperaments. As it was the explosive element was left, waiting for some spark to touch it off.

The spark made the resulting scandal all the worse by reason of its almost frivolous unimportance. There was an argument over the music played by the Royal Marine Band at a dance on board H.M.S. *Royal Oak*. The Admiral was convinced of the incompetence of the bandmaster – named Barnacle – and spoke his mind. In doing so he used epithets, common at sea, which reflected upon the bandmaster's habits. There was a second and trivial incident about the preparation of a gangway. The captain and commander seized the opportunity of complaining of the conduct of the Admiral. Letters were written which were characterised by Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, the Commander-in-Chief, as insubordinate. There was a court of inquiry, courts martial, and a scandal which sent the names of H.M.S. *Royal Oak* and Bandmaster Barnacle round the world, to the great detriment of the prestige of the British Navy.

## RETROGRESSION

Yet even during those unhappy days the Royal Navy played its part in Empire diplomacy. Egypt was in a ferment, the nationalists under Zaghlul doing all in their power to discredit Great Britain. Lord Lloyd, as High Commissioner, had a most difficult task, but he was continually helped by the Royal Navy. During one of the most critical periods a naval squadron was kept at sea, out of sight of land, off the Egyptian coast. At the psychological moment H.M.S. *Resolution* and other ships entered Alexandria harbour, and a situation which threatened serious consequences, was saved.

In the autumn of 1929 there was another unfortunate incident in the Mediterranean. This was the fault of no naval officer, and its effects in the international sphere could not have been foreseen by anybody in the Mediterranean Fleet.

On October 12th, 1929, a portion of the Mediterranean Fleet arrived at Constantinople. It was the Royal Navy's first visit since the Allied evacuation. The squadron, which was under the command of Admiral Sir Frederick Field, the Commander-in-Chief, consisted of his flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Courageous*, the yacht *Bryony*, and the destroyers *Veteran*, *Wanderer*, and *Wild Swan*.

The visit of this squadron to the Bosphorus was intended to cement Anglo-Turkish friendship – it was characterised in *The Times* as a "Mission of Peace." By way of celebration, the visit was marked by a British naval "pageant" which lasted two days and which entailed the co-operation of men from all the ships and of aircraft from H.M.S. *Courageous*.

Soviet Russia got wind of the British naval visit, and took steps to counteract any Anglophile effect which it might have upon Turkey.

On the very day on which the British naval squadron arrived in the Bosphorus, Karakhan, the Soviet Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs, arrived in Angora. It

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

was afterwards stated that Karakhan had been instructed to do his utmost to bring Turkey and Soviet Russia together, since Moscow feared that the visit of the British Mediterranean Fleet to Constantinople might cause Turkey to drift out of Moscow's political orbit.

The result was a renewal and tightening of the Turko-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Friendship which had originally been signed in Paris in 1925. This meant a strengthening of the bonds which sealed the Sea of Marmora and the Black Sea to British influence. Thus the Navy's "Mission of Peace" had exactly the opposite effect to that intended.

The year 1930 marked a milestone in post-war naval history. On Tuesday, April 22nd, of that year the London Naval Treaty was signed at St. James's Palace. This extended to all other categories of warships the limitations imposed upon capital ships and aircraft carriers at Washington in 1922.

The conclusion of this treaty by the second Labour Government of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had a profound effect upon the Royal Navy. Officers and men believed implicitly in the dictum of Lord Beatty, supported by Lord Jellicoe, that seventy cruisers was the "irreducible minimum" with which the safety of the Empire and its communications could be assured. It came as a great shock to the Navy when a treaty was signed which cut the maximum number of cruisers from seventy to fifty. Nor were the true implications of other clauses in this treaty lost upon the Navy. The general public might believe in the figure of fifty cruisers, but the men in the fleet, seeing the technical provisions in other clauses, were quick to realise that their Service could not, under the terms of that treaty, aspire to more than thirty-six modern cruisers by the end of 1936.

Nowhere was the effect of the London Naval Treaty of 1930 more marked than in the Mediterranean. The reason was not far to seek. The two major Mediterranean

## RETROGRESSION

naval Powers – France and Italy – refused to subscribe to the limitation provisions of the Treaty. There was between these two Powers considerable naval rivalry. In view of the London Naval Treaty, the British Mediterranean Fleet was forced to watch this rivalry from a position of passivity which would better have suited a nation unconcerned with the mastery of the inland sea.

In the years between the Armistice and the London Naval Treaty, Great Britain had laid down fifteen heavy cruisers armed with 8-inch guns. During the same period France had laid down a total of nine cruisers (three of which were armed with 8-inch guns) and Italy a total of ten cruisers (six with 8-inch guns).

Thus against fifteen new cruisers of post-war design for the whole of the British Empire (two were in any case units of the Royal Australian Navy), Italy built ten cruisers and France nine. Although France has, as she is fond of stressing, three coasts, she was at that time – before German rearmament – concerned only with the Mediterranean.

The number of cruisers actually under construction at the signing of the London Naval Treaty was:

Great Britain	1	(armed with 8-inch guns)
France	3	(all armed with 8-inch guns)
Italy	3	(2 armed with 8-inch and 1 with 6-inch guns)

The predominance of new construction in the other principal Mediterranean Powers was even more marked in the smaller types of warship. This is best shown as follows:

<i>Ships of post-war design</i>	Completed since war	Building
<i>Destroyers in April 1930:</i>		
British Empire	2	18
France	27	14
Italy	38	13



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

<i>Ships of post-war design</i>	Completed since war	Building
<i>Submarines in April 1930:</i>		
British Empire	8	11
France	20	39
Italy	17	15

Having declined to limit their navies by signing the London Naval Treaty, the Mediterranean naval Powers accelerated their building of the types of craft most suited to challenge British naval supremacy in the inland sea. In the years 1930 and 1931 Great Britain laid down six submarines. In those years France laid down fourteen submarines and Italy laid down *twenty-six*. Thus the British Mediterranean Fleet had to look on while other nations, whose politicians had been too far-sighted to bind them to continued disarmament, built up new navies.

To watch somebody else preparing for war, and to be prevented from taking even the most obvious precautions, is bad for the morale of the bravest. The British Mediterranean Fleet had to do all that and more. *It had to bluff shame out of countenance.*

When the greater portion of the Atlantic Fleet mutinied at Invergordon in September 1931, and brought about a situation in which English Treasury notes were regarded abroad with open distrust, the Mediterranean Fleet had to try to "keep its end up." The task was made more difficult by knowledge that the tragedy of Invergordon had been brought about by the inept administration which had handed to the forces of disruption a charter of discontent upon a salver of golden opportunity.

Officers in the Mediterranean Fleet had at that time some difficulty in maintaining discipline, not because there was any threat of mutiny, but because of the universal and outspoken criticism of the Board of Admiralty.

## CHAPTER VIII

### REVOLT AND SCHISM

The Cyprus revolt – bombs & battleships – the Greek monarchist revolt –  
Turkish shooting of British naval officers

THE HISTORY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN for the first fifteen years after the Great War seems to show Greece as the *enfant terrible* of that part of the world. Whether or not it was the fault of Greece, that unhappy country seemed to be concerned in nearly every one of the “incidents” which go to make up the history of the Mediterranean during that period.

Even in a revolt in a British Crown Colony, Greece played the rôle of “villain of the piece.”

Cyprus was a new addition to the British Empire. The island had been Turkish territory in British occupation until the Great War, and had only been granted the recognised status of a Crown Colony in 1925. It is an island the true strategical importance of which is only now being recognised. Situated in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean, it lies in a position to threaten the flank of any Power attacking Egypt and the Suez Canal. It also covers Haifa – the Palestine port which, in recent years, has gained such enormously increased importance because it is the Mediterranean terminal of the pipe line from the Mosul oil-fields. The growth of air power has also added to the strategical importance of Cyprus, for the island lies on the direct air route from Europe to Damascus, Rutbah Wells, and the East.

Cyprus was, during the years following the Great War,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

affected by the new-found and almost fanatical nationalism to which the whole of the Near East was a prey.

In Cyprus this did not take the form of a desire to found a new nation, but for union with an old. A large portion of the population of Cyprus was of Greek origin, it was ruled in its daily life by the Orthodox Church – a body which, in Cyprus, supplemented its spiritual functions by political activity of the most temporal and virulent type. There was in the island a strong body which desired union with Greece. This doctrine of Hellenic union was called Enosis.

Sir Ronald Storrs, who was Governor of Cyprus in the troublous years from 1926 to 1932, gives, in his book *Orientalisms*, a graphic description of the machinations and manifestations of this movement, and of the difficulty of dealing with it.

In 1931 the financial crisis affected Cyprus as it did every other place in the civilised world. It became obvious that the budget of the island could not be balanced without additional taxation. This was resented, and was followed by the breakdown of the somewhat Gilbertian system of legislature. Recourse to government by Orders in Council became necessary. This was by no means the first occasion on which Orders in Council had had to be invoked owing to the collapse of the so-called constitutional system of government. On this occasion, however, the situation was exploited by two men who had for some time been conspicuous in their agitation for the union of Cyprus with Greece. These were Mr. Kyron, the Greek Consul, and Monseigneur Nicodhimos Mylonas, the Metropolitan Bishop of Kition. The Governor of the island had, it may be remarked, made representations on more than one occasion that Mr. Kyron should be superseded on account of his pro-Greek activities.

The politics of these two gentlemen so inflamed the mob that, on the evening of October 21st, 1931, it

## REVOLT AND SCHISM

marched on Government House. There it became completely out of hand, stoned the handful of police, smashed the windows of the house, and finally burnt it to the ground. It was only when Government House was burning that the police opened fire. The mob then fled. The house of the Commissioner at Limassol was also fired with petrol by a mob.

In this critical situation the Governor of Cyprus cabled for reinforcements. The cruisers H.M.S. *London* and H.M.S. *Shropshire* and the destroyers H.M.S. *Achates* and H.M.S. *Acasta* were at Suda Bay, a deep inlet on the north coast of the island of Crete, rather more than 500 miles west of Cyprus. These ships, under the command of Rear-Admiral J. W. C. Henley, immediately left their anchorages and proceeded at high speed to Cyprus. H.M.S. *London*, the flagship, went to Larnaca, H.M.S. *Shropshire* to Limassol, H.M.S. *Acasta* to Paphos, and H.M.S. *Achates* to Famagusta.

The arrival of the warships at once produced an improvement in the situation in Cyprus. The safety of the ports was immediately assured, and the presence of the warships had a sobering effect in the most important centres. Particularly was this the case at Larnaca, where H.M.S. *London* landed a detachment of Royal Marines and seamen immediately on her arrival. Sir Ronald Storrs pays a well-deserved tribute to the men both of the Royal Navy and the Army when he says: "I am still under my first grateful amazement at the patience and forbearance of both forces in the face of every kind of provocation."

Provocation there certainly was. The armed forces of the British Empire were not popular with the Cypriots, inflamed, as they were, with philhellene ardour, and the thunderings of the bishop and other agitators, on the subject of "this abomination which is called English occupation and administration of Cyprus." Nor were they slow to show their hostility. Slogans and the Greek

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

National Anthem were shouted at officers and men, and the blue-and-white flag of Greece was waved in their faces.

The amused tolerance with which the men of the Royal Navy regarded all this excitement was reflected in the question of the armed and tin-hatted seaman landed to guard the port offices at Larnaca. After surveying the scene in silence for a few moments, he asked where "the bloomin' cup-final" was. Amusement, however, soon gave place to more serious thoughts, for the populace, finding the British marines and sailors impervious to their choicest – though mercifully unintelligible – insults, began to use brick-bats to convey their meaning. Many a man left the "enchanted island" bearing bruises earned by standing firm before a shower of stones. They did stand firm – with a firmness which refused to be provoked into retaliation. Thus the Cypriots found no excuse for giving it out that they were being martyred by the armed forces of England, and their cause suffered in consequence.

The speedy end which was brought to the Cyprus revolt was due in no small measure to the presence and bearing of the men from the warships, although the actual ending was brought about by a coup engineered by the Governor and carried out by the police and the military. Yet in this, too, the Royal Navy played an essential part.

In the small hours of the morning of October 25th parties of police and troops, moving singly so as not to attract attention, laid cordons close around the houses of the Bishop of Kition and the politicians who had been the ringleaders of the insurrection. When all was ready, the houses were entered and the stormy petrels hurried unceremoniously from their roosts. Quickly and quietly they were taken in custody to landing-stages where boats were in readiness to take them to the cruisers H.M.S. *London* and H.M.S. *Shropshire*.

This action made a clean sweep of the agitators and leaders – Mr. Kyron, the Greek Consul, had had his

## REVOLT AND SCHISM

consular *exequatur* withdrawn and had left the island. The surprise was complete, and, under the first shock of finding themselves leaderless, the insurgents allowed the Governor to take the initiative in a decisive manner.

On board the cruisers the philhellene firebrands were treated as honoured guests rather than prisoners for deportation.

The Bishop of Kition found himself on board H.M.S. *Shropshire*. At first the officers in the wardroom were somewhat at a loss how to treat the venerable divine, with his long black hair and beard. He commanded respect in spite of the fact that he had been instrumental in stirring up strife against British rule. The bishop, however, soon put the officers at their ease. He removed his tall Greek Orthodox head-dress, and it was seen that he had fastened to the inside of it the episcopal jewels, in order that they should not be left behind if flight became necessary. Relieved of this rather weighty head-dress, he asked for a stiff whisky and soda. The ice was immediately and effectively broken. The display of the jewels was a pretty compliment of trust, and the need for a whisky and soda, even at that early hour in the morning, after having been dragged out of bed with scant ceremony and put under arrest, argued a humanity beneath the forbidding and Rasputin-like exterior. The rebel bishop and his messmates became fast friends.

The Cyprus revolt cannot be characterised as a very important event from the naval point of view. Only a small portion of the Mediterranean Fleet was in any way concerned, and its task occupied only a few days. Nevertheless, it was far from being unimportant in its effect upon the morale of the Royal Navy. We have seen how circumstances had for years been cultivating in the fleet a spirit verging upon defeatism. In the Cyprus revolt the Royal Navy again found demonstration of its indispensability. The Navy had been called upon to assist in a critical situation. It had acted promptly and with the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

most conspicuous success. Instead of the tables being turned against it by diplomatic action, as had been the case in Turkish waters in 1923 and 1929, the naval action at Cyprus was instrumental in bringing about a successful issue. There was an immediate rise in British naval prestige at a time when this was most sorely needed.

Unfortunately, the influence of the British Navy in international affairs, and its importance in British eyes, was subjected to a new and insidious attack at home.

In the early autumn of 1933 an exercise, in which both the Home Fleet and the Royal Air Force took part, was carried out off the approaches to the Firth of Forth. The exercise was designed to give the maximum of training to the Royal Air Force personnel, both in reconnaissance over the sea and in recognising and attacking warships. In order to fulfil this primary requirement, artificial restrictions were imposed upon the fleet, which had to steam close to the land and carry out a mock bombardment of the coast. Representatives of the Press were with both sides. Those with the defenders, however, had the advantage of being able to telephone direct from the aerodromes to their newspaper offices, while the messages of those with the fleet were unavoidably delayed by the necessity for preserving wireless "silence" during the exercise.

On the morning after the first sighting of the fleet by the distant air reconnaissance, nearly all the newspapers in Great Britain carried "banner" headlines and sensational "stories" of how the fleet had been "blown out of the water" by the defending aircraft. So great was the similarity in the headlines and accounts that there was immediate suspicion that they had been "inspired." The suspicion seemed to be confirmed to one naval correspondent when travelling back to London from Edinburgh. A Press photographer who had been at one of the chief aerodromes told him that official "guidance" had been given to the journalists at that aerodrome.

## REVOLT AND SCHISM

The Admiralty was both pained and angry, and a protest was lodged with the Air Ministry. The damage, however, had been done. Up and down the country, in Press, public-house, and even in Parliament, arguments were vociferated which sought to prove once again that the Navy was an expensive anachronism, the units of which would exist only upon sufferance in the face of air power. Utterly fantastic claims were put forward by some of the more "air minded" newspapers, and these could not be effectively denied without infringement of the Official Secrets Act.

This was before the rearmament programme was even mooted. It was before the first Government White Paper on Defence, issued on March 4th, 1935, which put the Defence Services back into their proper perspective by pointing out that the Navy remained the first line of Empire defence, and that "the growing power of air forces, however it may have changed other conditions of warfare, has still left our merchant ships on the vast ocean spaces as open to naval attack as before. The necessities of naval defence remain, therefore, unaltered."

It happened at a time when disarmament and economy at the expense of the Defence Services were the order of the day – before the great truth that "ineffective defence means not only waste, but defeat" was realised. At that time there was cut-throat competition between the Services as to which would be able to dig deepest into the pockets of the Treasury. There was, in fact, ample motive for "inspired" publicity by one Service at the expense of another.

At that time, moreover, there was in the Navy rapidly growing dissatisfaction with the system of dual control of the Fleet Air Arm. This purely naval weapon had been placed, experimentally, under the dual control of the Admiralty and Air Ministry by the Balfour Committee of 1923. In the interval the obvious inefficiency of such a system of divided control had been demonstrated



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

on many occasions. The voice of protest had been raised, only to be met by Mr. Baldwin by expression of the pious hope that the matter should be ignored. To many naval officers the sudden flood of propaganda decrying the Navy and exalting air power was regarded as a manœuvre on the part of the Air Ministry to counter the growing insistence for full naval control of the Fleet Air Arm.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, schism was well served. It persisted long after the Government had issued two White Papers on Defence, the second of which, issued on March 3rd, 1936, again stressed "the overwhelming importance of the Navy." Nor was it finally laid when, in November 1936, there was issued the report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence set up under the chairmanship of Sir Thomas Inskip "to consider the experiments that have taken place or are proposed in connection with the defence against aircraft and the vulnerability from the air of capital ships."

Schism in the Defence Services is not only regrettable; it is highly dangerous. Within the Services themselves it is dangerous because it is detrimental to the perfect co-operation between the three arms which is essential to the development and maintenance of maximum efficiency. Outside the Services it is dangerous because the argument is almost always taken up by ill-informed persons. This is apt to lead to the misleading of the public, upon whom all three Defence Services ultimately depend.

In the Royal Navy the constant arguments in Parliament and in the Press, nearly all of which sought to show the Navy as a useless and effete service, clinging desperately to tradition as the peg on which hung pay and pensions, had a twofold effect.

The first reaction was anger that such stupid fallacies, which could be proved idiotic and dangerous by the

## REVOLT AND SCHISM

experience and experiments to which the Navy was always adding, should receive such wide circulation and credence. It was impotent anger, for proof and counter-arguments lay entrenched behind the prickly provisions of the Official Secrets Act.

Secondly, it led to a lowering of morale. The personnel of the Royal Navy is by no means hypersensitive. It does, however, hold its tradition sacred. To be continually, powerfully, and ignorantly attacked; to know that such attacks are quite unjustified and infinitely harmful, yet to be unable to raise a hand or voice in defence – that is a state of affairs which will have its effect upon the spirit of the strongest.

The only demonstrations of modern air power have come from abroad – from Greece, Spain, and the Far East.

In the Whangpoo River, the Yangtze Kiang, in the neighbourhood of Crete, and around the coasts of Spain, a great many tons of bombs have been directed against ships with conspicuous ill-success. True, the American gunboat *Panay* was sunk by air attack in the Yangtze Kiang, but nobody would try to claim that a tiny river gunboat can stand up against bombs from the air.

The Greek Monarchist revolt broke out on March 1st, 1935. The “bomb *v.* battleship” controversy was then at its height in England. The Greek rebels seized the old armoured cruiser *Georgios Averoff*, the light cruiser *Helle*, the destroyers *Psara* and *Leon*, and three submarines. They also indulged in the modern version of “spiking the guns” of two other warships – by removing their breech blocks.

The revolt had a very slight effect upon the dispositions of the British Mediterranean Fleet, apart from the fact that the port of Salonika had to be avoided, since it was heavily mined. The battleship H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*, flagship of Admiral Sir William Fisher – in the absence in England of H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* –

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

went to Phaleron Bay to protect British interests and watch events.

The revolt shed some light upon the "bomb v. battle-ship" controversy. It very soon resolved itself into warfare between the rebels, based upon Crete and having in their possession the most powerful units of the Greek Navy, and the republicans on the mainland, with the Greek air force as the only available striking force for overseas operations (the remainder of the navy was shut up in Salonika behind the minefield).

The mainland's chief objective in its air attacks was the sinking of the old armoured cruiser *Georgios Averoff*. This ship, with her four 9·2-inch guns and eight 7·5-inch guns, seemed to exercise a threat which the mainland found most uncomfortable. Strong air squadrons took off from the mainland, located the cruiser, and subjected her to a number of heavy attacks. The ship was certainly hit on more than one occasion. Photographs of bomb explosions on board and of fires started by bomb explosions appeared in the British Press.

The *Georgios Averoff*, however, so far from being sunk at the first attack, as should have happened if the claims of air power had been in any way justified, was not seriously damaged and is still in service.

It must be remembered that the *Georgios Averoff* was an old ship, designed before air power began to influence naval architects. She was completed in 1910, and the maximum thickness of her deck armour was two inches. Moreover, the attacking aircraft must have had things very much their own way, for the ship's anti-aircraft armament consisted of only two 3-inch high-angle guns of obsolete pattern.

In the summer of 1934 there occurred in the Mediterranean an incident in which strong action on the part of the naval authorities on the spot was discounted and turned to weakness by the British Government.

A skiff was away sailing from H.M.S. *Devonshire*,

## REVOLT AND SCHISM

which was on a visit to Port Tigani, Samos. There was nothing to show that boats were not to approach certain areas. When the skiff was about 100 yards from the mainland, Turkish sentries appeared and waved. The sentries made a beckoning gesture, which, in Turkey, means "keep away." The British officers interpreted this signal in the western manner. The Turkish sentries then opened fire with rifles. Surgeon-Lieutenant Robinson was killed and Lieutenant Mounsell wounded.

Strong representations were at once made to the Turkish Government. In order to back these, Admiral Sir William Fisher, the Commander-in-Chief, immediately concentrated a powerful squadron in the area. The squadron included his flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*, H.M.S. *Devonshire*, H.M.S. *London*, H.M.S. *Shropshire*, and a flotilla of destroyers.

For this action Sir William Fisher incurred the displeasure of Whitehall. The naval concentration was dispersed. The inquiry upon which the British authorities had insisted was abandoned and Sir John Simon made excuses in the House of Commons to the effect that the skiff was not flying a flag and the officers were not in uniform. The incident was settled through "the diplomatic channel" by an expression of regret on the part of the Turkish Ambassador for the "tragic misunderstanding," and the payment of a mere £2,000 by way of compensation. The handling of this affair by the British Government compares somewhat strangely with Mussolini's action after the Janina murders.

In the ten years of peaceful routine in the Mediterranean, events and circumstances seemed to conspire to reduce the prestige and morale of the British Navy before its grip upon the inland sea should be seriously challenged.

## CHAPTER IX

### VOLTE-FACE

Franco-Italian *rapprochement* – Mussolini “squares” France – the balance of power upset – Italy’s naval building – Italian war preparations – British precautions – Government blunders

THE YEAR 1935 saw a complete reversal of conditions in the Mediterranean.

It has always been one of the cardinal principles of British foreign policy to poise in the centre of a sensitive balance of power, ready to exert influence to depress the scales at either side in order to preserve the balance and the strength of British influence. The Mediterranean sphere in the fifteen years following the Great War provided an excellent example of this system – which persisted in spite of the avowed loyalty of the Powers to the League of Nations. France and Italy were the rivals at each end of the balance. Both Powers were careful to preserve – outwardly at least – cordial relations with Great Britain, the power of whose fleet could at any moment have upset that balance and given one of the rivals preponderance over the other. Early in 1935 the balance was suddenly upset by a settlement of the Franco-Italian differences. In place of rivalry, an understanding was reached between the two Powers which approached closely to a diplomatic alliance. The influence which could be exerted by the British Mediterranean Fleet was reduced at one stroke from pre-eminence to a subsidiary consideration in Mediterranean politics.

It was the beginning of the challenge to the British naval mastery of the Mediterranean. Within a few

## VOLTE-FACE

months the world was to be treated to the unprecedented sight of a British Government going hat in hand to ask for naval support in the Mediterranean.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of this sudden change in the Mediterranean situation. It made possible the chain of events which brought Europe to the very verge of war; which threatened the major portion of the British Navy and the main Empire trade route to the East; and which has now led to the greatest rearmament programme in history.

As so often happens in history, this major change had its genesis far from the inland sea upon which it had so great an effect.

On January 30th, 1933 – nearly two years before the sudden Franco-Italian *rapprochement* – Adolf Hitler came into power in Germany. Like Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany was fully occupied with internal affairs during the opening years of his regime. Nevertheless, both Italy and France were quick to realise that Nazi-ism stood for German expansion and revision of the Peace Treaty, which had been designed to hold Germany down in innocuous weakness for all time. Italy feared German expansion southwards. France feared German expansion westwards. Both Powers saw that, since either of them might at any moment find itself in need of assistance from the other, it was in the interest of each country to end their differences.

These differences were twofold. In Central Europe and the Danube basin French and Italian jealousy had dominated the situation since the end of the Great War. Now, however, it became obvious both in Rome and Paris that Germany, in her new guise, menaced the French and Italian interests in that area to a far greater degree than they had hitherto menaced those of each other. The central European differences of the two Powers were therefore subordinated to a common aim. In the spring of 1935 France and Italy formally ranged

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

themselves side by side against Germany in the formation of the "Stresa Front."

The other Franco-Italian differences had a more definite bearing upon the Mediterranean. They were concerned with their North African colonies, and they had been aggravated by the naval rivalry of the two Powers in the Mediterranean. They had their origin in the London Agreement of April 26th, 1915, under which certain territorial concessions in Africa were promised to Italy in return for her support of the Allies in the Great War. France had never kept her promises to Italy under this agreement, and the result had been constant friction between the two Powers. There had, it is true, been a settlement some years before of the boundary between Italian Libya and French North Africa, but this had fallen far short of Italian ambitions. The only satisfactory settlement of Italian claims in Northern Africa had been the rectification of the frontier between Italian Libya and Egypt, which had been achieved by the Jarabub Agreement signed on December 6th, 1925, by Ziwar Pasha and Count Caccia Dominioni. The Franco-Italian frontiers in North Africa remained contentious.

Another cause of jealousy lay in Tunisia, which France had appropriated in the teeth of Italian ambitions, and where there lived a considerable number of Italian nationals. In Tunisia the Franco-Italian tension was increased and kept always in the forefront by Italy's insistence that the Italian residents in the colony should retain their Italian nationality, use the Italian language, and have their own schools and institutions.

North Africa, indeed, presented sources of disaffection between Italy and France which seemed impossible of solution — until the rise of Hitler made their settlement politic to both sides.

In the autumn of 1934 negotiations were opened between the two Mediterranean Powers with the object of finding some basis for a general settlement of the

## VOLTE-FACE

differences in Northern Africa. By the end of the year agreement was in sight, and on January 3rd, 1935, M. Laval, the French Foreign Minister, who had succeeded to that office after the assassination of M. Barthou when driving through the streets of Marseilles with King Alexander of Yugo-Slavia, went to Rome. It is worth noting that M. Laval's visit to Rome occurred on the very day on which Abyssinia sent a telegram to Geneva drawing attention to Italian aggression on the frontier between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland, and asking the League of Nations to take action under Article XI of the Covenant. This Article states that:

"Any war or threat of war . . . is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations."

On the evening of January 6th M. Laval had a private meeting with Mussolini. Four days later an official *communiqué* was issued in Rome announcing that complete agreement had been reached between the two Governments on "all questions concerning the application of Article 13 of the London Agreement of April 26th, 1915." This meant complete liquidation of the differences between France and Italy over their North African colonies, and the creation of something very like a Franco-Italian diplomatic alliance.

When the terms of the settlement became known, it was immediately obvious that there was something behind the mere solution of the North African questions, for Italy secured only a minute fraction of her erstwhile claims. Italy had demanded a strip of territory running from Libya to Lake Chad, a thousand miles to the south, to form an Italian "corridor" from Libya to Nigeria, between French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. She secured a rearrangement of the Libyan



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

frontier so that another 44,000 square miles of desert, with a total of sixty-nine inhabitants, came under Italian rule; also a small slice of French Somaliland amounting to 309 square miles, and a few of the French Government-owned shares in the Jibuti-Addis Ababa Railway. Italy, moreover, abandoned the principle whereby Italian residents in Tunisia retained their nationality. No wonder Mussolini snarled that he was not "a collector of deserts."

Italy certainly had not made France pay dearly for her friendship, particularly as the overtures had come from France. M. Laval has most strenuously denied that he "sold Abyssinia" to Italy during his visit to Rome in January 1935. The fact remains, however, that, from the conclusion of the settlement of January 10th, France became at least sympathetic towards Italian expansion. In this attitude there became implicit a complete reversal of France's policy with regard to the League of Nations. France had always been the champion of the League, and was anxious to keep its machinery in working order in case it might be used against Germany, yet during the Italo-Abyssinian War France was the brake which continually held back the League from effective action against Italy.

No apology is offered for this excursion into high international politics. The Mussolini-Laval agreement of January 1935, and its causes and effects, have had too great a bearing upon the recent history of the Mediterranean to be ignored in any chronicle of the naval occasions enacted upon it.

Although the Franco-Italian friendship forged in January 1935 at once brought to an end the naval rivalry in the Mediterranean between the two Powers, it did not lead to any cessation of naval building by either Italy or France. Rather was their naval construction accelerated. Italy was by this time actively preparing for a war of conquest in Abyssinia. Although Abyssinia was an

## VOLTE-FACE

inland country totally devoid of naval forces, such a war could not be undertaken without ensuring the security of the line of communication from Italy, through the Mediterranean, and down the Red Sea to Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Mussolini did not then know whether or not this line of communication would be threatened when he moved against Abyssinia. His *rapprochement* with France enormously lessened the danger. He was not the man, however, to leave things to chance. He continued to expend tremendous effort in strengthening his naval forces and his air forces in the Mediterranean.

France, on the other hand, was pre-occupied with the German repudiation, one by one, of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, and she accelerated her naval construction in order to counteract the efforts of Germany.

Already the naval building of France and Italy was bidding fair to place the British Mediterranean Fleet in a position of somewhat doubtful superiority.

In 1932 France had announced that she proposed to build two battle cruisers of 26,500 tons (the *Dunkerque* and the *Strasbourg*) as a "reply" to Germany's "pocket battleships." Two years later Italy forsook her stand of ten years before, when it had been stated that the Italian Admiralty was entirely opposed to the capital ship, and laid down two battleships of 35,000 tons (the *Vittorio Veneto* and the *Littorio*). Great Britain was still bound by treaty not to lay down a capital ship.

Between the signing of the London Naval Treaty of April 22nd, 1930, and the Franco-Italian *rapprochement* of January 10th, 1935, France had completed five cruisers of 10,000 tons armed with 8-inch guns, and two cruiser minelayers, and had laid down six cruisers of 7,600 tons mounting 6-inch guns. Italy had completed four cruisers of 10,000 tons armed with 8-inch guns, and six cruisers of a smaller tonnage carrying 6-inch guns. She had also laid down six cruisers mounting 6-inch

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

guns. During the same period Great Britain had completed two cruisers mounting 8-inch guns and four cruisers with 6-inch guns, while she had laid down ten cruisers mounting 6-inch guns. These figures are eloquent when one considers the difference in commitments between the navies of France and Italy and that of the British Empire.

In torpedo craft France had completed twenty-three vessels between the signing of the London Naval Treaty and the Mussolini-Laval agreement, and had laid down a further twenty vessels. Seventeen of those built and eight of those under construction were in reality light cruisers, although they were classed by France as *contre-torpilleurs*. In the same period Italy had completed sixteen vessels and laid down a further six. Great Britain, carrying on with a steady programme for the replacement of the old wartime destroyers, had completed forty-two ships and had another seventeen on the stocks.

It was natural that Italy, working gradually towards a plan which entailed an overseas war of conquest with a long sea line of communication behind her armies – from Naples to Massawa (Eritrea) is 2,100 miles and from Naples to Mogadishu (Italian Somaliland) is 3,700 miles – should concentrate upon those weapons most likely to be feared by any possible opponents. Those weapons could be classed under three headings: submarines; small, fast, surface torpedo craft eminently suited for work in narrow waters such as the Malta channel; and aircraft.

During the five years which elapsed between the signing of the London Naval Treaty of 1930 and the substitution of friendship for rivalry between Italy and France, Great Britain completed eighteen submarines, while she had a further six submarines building at the beginning of 1935.

In the same five years Italy completed thirty-one submarines, and she had a further eight on the building

## VOLTE-FACE

slips at the beginning of 1935. Nor did she slacken her effort in this arm, for during the year 1935 she laid the keels of a further twelve submarines.

Italy, moreover, had at her disposal at the beginning of 1935 forty-two fast motor torpedo-boats, and she was continuing to build these vessels very rapidly. In 1937 she had a hundred built and twenty under construction. These craft are similar to the coastal motor-boats which had been developed by Great Britain during the Great War and used with great effect at such operations as the blocking of Zeebrugge and the raid on Kronstadt. They usually carried two torpedoes. Such craft have in the past been considered rather as fair-weather vessels for use in narrow waters, although many of the British coastal motor-boats operated in the North Sea and Straits of Dover during the war, when the weather was anything but perfect. The conception of them as purely coastal craft has recently been disproved by the unescorted voyage of a flotilla of British motor torpedo-boats to the Mediterranean.

Great Britain possessed no fast motor torpedo-boats at the beginning of 1935. During that year, however, six were ordered, although only two of them were commenced before the following year. Parliamentary authority for the purchase of these six vessels was sought under the Supplementary Estimate for the Navy presented on February 12th, 1936.

So far as air power in the Mediterranean was concerned, the advantage lay with Italy against any Power which might challenge the passage of her transports from Italy to the northern approaches to the Suez Canal. Large and up-to-date air stations had been established in Sardinia to protect the west coast of Italy, in Sicily and southern Italy to protect the south coast and constitute a threat to the Malta channel, and in the Dodecanese and the island of Rhodes, whence Italian aircraft could provide a considerable threat to the Mediterranean

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

terminals of the oil pipe line from Mosul to Haifa and Tripoli (Syria), and even exercise some influence over the Suez Canal and its northern approaches.

Materially and strategically, Italy had placed herself in a very strong position by years of careful preparation. Diplomatically she strengthened herself to a very great degree by her acceptance of the French overtures for friendship. It was not such a bad bargain which Mussolini had struck with M. Laval on that January evening in Rome. It placed Mussolini in a position in which he had little to fear in the Mediterranean while he embarked upon his long-prepared war of conquest in Abyssinia.

The Italian preparations for war were accelerated so soon as the Mussolini-Laval agreement was reached. General De Bono, who was to lead the attack on Abyssinia, sailed from Naples for Massawa on the very day on which the Franco-Italian settlement was signed. Immediately on his arrival in Eritrea he began to raise an army corps of native troops and to prepare to receive a large army from Italy.

Early in February two divisions of Italian regular troops were mobilised on a war footing, and they began to leave for East Africa in the same month. There was no secrecy about the Italian preparations. It would, indeed, have been impossible to conceal such large-scale preparations, since all the Italian transports had to pass through the Suez Canal. It is a matter of doubt whether preparations for modern war can ever be concealed, involving, as they do, large purchases of all manner of commodities from so many sources of supply.

Admiral Sir William Fisher watched these preparations as an interested spectator. His fleet was weakened by the absence in England of the battleship H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*. He had at his disposal at that time four battleships and one aircraft carrier; a squadron of heavy cruisers and a squadron of light cruisers, each consisting of four ships; three destroyer flotillas; and one

## VOLTE-FACE

flotilla of submarines. During the spring cruise of 1935 he was temporarily reinforced by the two aircraft carriers H.M.S. *Courageous* and H.M.S. *Furious* of the Home Fleet, which carried out exercises in the Mediterranean. These two ships, however, left the Mediterranean in March, and Sir William Fisher was left with H.M.S. *Eagle* as his only aircraft carrier. This ship, which was being built for Chile as the battleship *Almirante Cochrane* when war broke out, was bought in her half-built state by the British Government in 1917 and completed as an aircraft carrier. For her size — her displacement is 22,600 tons — she has the extraordinarily small complement of twenty-one aircraft. It is said that the new aircraft carriers building for the Royal Navy, which will have a displacement very similar to that of H.M.S. *Eagle*, will each accommodate at least seventy aircraft.

It is difficult to believe that the exercises of the two Home Fleet aircraft carriers with the Mediterranean Fleet could have been arranged by the Admiralty with an eye to the probability of their being required in Mediterranean waters some months later. Nevertheless, the opportunity afforded for these aircraft carriers to work with the Mediterranean Fleet in their own waters was later to prove most valuable. On the other hand, there is little doubt that realisation of the great predominance in large and fast cruisers of the Mediterranean navies over the British Mediterranean Fleet led the Admiralty to decide that the Battle Cruiser Squadron was to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet later in the year. This squadron then consisted only of H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Renown*, the third battle cruiser, H.M.S. *Repulse*, being at Portsmouth undergoing modernisation and large repairs. The decision that the battle cruisers were to join the Mediterranean Fleet was announced by Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell in his "Statement Explanatory of the Navy Estimates" dated March 1st, 1935, although the decision had been taken some months previously.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty explained that the decision had been taken "so as to make the numbers of capital ships in the two fleets approximately equal."

It is, however, extremely doubtful whether the Admiralty foresaw, in the early days of 1935, that the policy of the Government nine months later would place a well-nigh unbearable strain upon its attenuated resources. Certainly Admiral Sir William Fisher did not know in January or February of that year what attitude the British Government would take as regards the obvious eventuality of war in East Africa. The officers and men under his command were at that time far more concerned with the prospect of a short visit to England to take part in King George V's Jubilee Review of the Fleet at Spithead.

Mussolini did not then know what stand the British Government would take when he embarked upon his war of conquest. It is, in fact, painfully clear that the British Government did not itself know, at that time, what policy it was to be forced to adopt by one of those queer and sudden crystallisations of public opinion in England.

The British Government did, however, know in January 1935 that Italy intended to embark upon a war of conquest in Abyssinia. In that month a committee, under the chairmanship of Sir John Maffey, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, was set up to examine the extent of British interests in Abyssinia, and the probable effect upon them of Italian conquest of the country. This committee reported in June that:

"There are no vital British interests in Abyssinia or adjoining countries such as to necessitate British resistance to an Italian conquest of Abyssinia . . . the threat to British interests appears distant and would depend only on a war against Italy, which for the moment appears improbable."

## VOLTE-FACE

Although the Maffey Committee was set up in January 1935, Sir John Simon, the then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, told the House of Commons on February 15th that the Italian preparations "in no way imply that it is the intention of the Italian Government to abandon their endeavours to seek an amicable settlement of their differences with Ethiopia."

The policy of the British Government at that time was, in fact, one of turning the blind eye and uttering reassuring phrases, while it wondered which way the cat would jump – with the great force of British public opinion in the rôle of the cat. Being a democratic Government, with all the embarrassments of vote-catching, it may be forgiven for vacillation. It cannot, however, be forgiven for failing to weigh every possibility and to provide against the most uncomfortable and dangerous contingencies.

In the light of after events, it appears that during the first eight months of 1935 the British Government made well-nigh every mistake which it was possible for a Government to make. By failing to give any definite answers to the feelers put out by Italy, it exasperated Mussolini. By talking of settlement and of the League of Nations it encouraged the Emperor of Abyssinia to believe that he would receive support in the event of Italian aggression. By failing to galvanise the League into action when, on March 16th, Hitler announced the reintroduction of conscription in Germany in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, it annoyed France. By concluding a naval agreement with Germany on June 18th, and thus condoning, behind the back of France, Germany's naval breaches of the Peace Treaty, it forced France more desperately into the arms of Italy. Finally, by withdrawing practically the whole of the Mediterranean Fleet for the Jubilee Naval Review on July 16th, it gave Mussolini a false hope that England would not interfere with his designs.



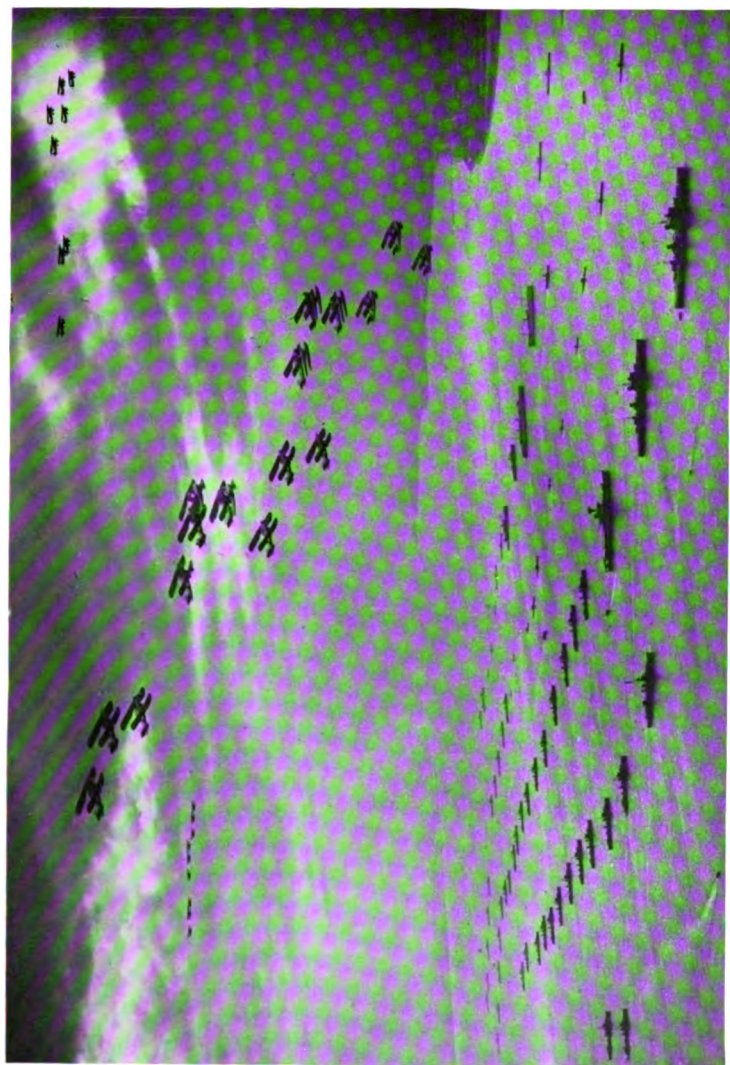
## CHAPTER X

### PRELUDE TO WAR

Mediterranean Fleet at home for Jubilee Review – hardening of British public opinion against Italy – the “Peace Ballot” – Mussolini’s plan against Britain – trying to stave off crisis – the story of the Black Box

THE MIDDLE OF JULY 1935 found the Mediterranean almost empty of British warships. There remained in that sea only one aircraft carrier, a squadron of four lightly armed cruisers, and a single destroyer flotilla. The whole of the rest of the Mediterranean Fleet lay at Spithead for the Silver Jubilee Review by King George V. Admiral Sir William Fisher, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, was himself at Spithead in his flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*. He had with him from the Mediterranean the battleships *Royal Sovereign*, *Ramillies*, *Revenge*, and *Resolution*; the cruisers *London*, *Australia*, *Devonshire*, *Shropshire*, and *Coventry*; the Third and Fourth Destroyer Flotillas; and the First Submarine Flotilla.

It seems exceedingly probable that this great withdrawal of naval strength from the Mediterranean, even though only temporary, would not have been undertaken at that time unless the British Government had reliable information that events in that sea would not be precipitated during the absence of the British warships. The presence at Spithead of so many units of the Mediterranean Fleet, in fact, is but one of a series of incidents which seems to confirm the belief held in naval circles that the British Secret Service was in full possession of Mussolini’s plans with regard to Abyssinia, even down to the date for which the opening of hostilities was arranged.



The Royal Navy assembled for review in Spithead, with Fleet Air Arm machines flying overhead



## PRELUDE TO WAR

The one thing which nobody knew at that time was that there was shortly to come about in Great Britain a sudden and unexpected crystallisation of public opinion, which was to force the British Government to take action which it knew to be highly dangerous. It was the one factor, incalculable before the event, which transformed the Italo-Ethiopian conflict from an obscure colonial war, of no special interest to anybody but the two countries concerned, to the greatest and most dangerous crisis since 1914.

In the early summer of 1935 there could, certainly, have been detected among some classes of public opinion in Great Britain an uneasiness at the obvious bellicosity of Italy. But the feeling was then far from possessing that mass conviction which can force a democratic Government to its will. Moreover, it was submerged, for the time being, beneath the wave of loyalty and excitement which attended the Jubilee celebrations. British statesmen, nevertheless, had noted the fact that loyalty to the League and hostility to Italian intentions showed signs of growing, and they had early attempted to apply the brake to the tendency. As long ago as May 1934, Mr. Baldwin had declared in the House of Commons that: "If you are going to adopt a sanction, you must be prepared for war." In November of the same year Mr. Baldwin, speaking at Glasgow, said: "So long as I have responsibility in a Government for deciding whether or not this country shall join in a collective peace system, I will say this: never as an individual will I sanction the British Navy being used for an armed blockade of any country in the world until I know what the United States of America is going to do."

Brave words: the National Government, however, had sadly underestimated the extent to which the operation of a "collective peace system" appealed to the usually inarticulate idealism of the Englishman. It was to realise this with something of a shock eleven days after the Jubilee Naval Review at Spithead, while many of the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

units of the Mediterranean Fleet were still in home waters.

Eleven days before Mr. Baldwin made his speech at Glasgow in November 1934 there took place all over the United Kingdom the "Peace Ballot." Eleven days after King George V reviewed his fleet at Spithead in July 1935 the results of the ballot were declared at the Albert Hall.

The ballot was a triumph for the organisers. It was organised by the League of Nations Union, and sponsored and assisted by the Church and a number of progressive and religious organisations. The manner of its handling was bitterly criticised at the time. A number of questions were asked on the ballot paper, most of which could not have been answered by any thinking man without a careful review of any particular set of circumstances, and without a number of qualifications and reservations. The ballot, however, was based upon generalisations on questions of principle. It demanded a straightforward "Yes" or "No" to its questions, and the uncomfortable was dressed up in verbiage. It did not ask starkly whether the voter was prepared to go to war in the cause of peace. "Military sanctions" sounded much better, although it meant precisely the same thing.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the Peace Ballot, there is no doubt that it was largely responsible for bringing the British Empire to the verge of war.

The results of the ballot showed that 11,559,165 votes had been cast; 10,027,608 voters were in favour of the adoption of economic sanctions, while only 635,074 were against and 27,255 doubtful; 855,107 refrained from committing themselves on the issue of economic sanctions. For the adoption of military sanctions, if necessary, against a nation breaking the peace there were 6,784,368 votes in favour, 2,351,981 against, 40,893 doubtful, and 2,364,441 abstentions.

These results had an immediate effect upon the Government, which promptly took fright and decided that it would only be doing its duty as a Government representative

## PRELUDE TO WAR

of the will of the people if it gave strong support to the League of Nations against Italy. This it did, in spite of the fact that the Government was perfectly well aware of the danger involved, in view of the serious deficiencies in Defence Services.

Although the Government had issued its first "Statement Relating to Defence" some four months before, the British rearmament programme had not been begun. It was not to begin until after the General Election of November 1935 – after the crisis had been met and British influence in the Mediterranean had been challenged. The British Government, in fact, embarked upon an exceedingly dangerous game of bluff in which the ill-prepared Defence Services, and, indeed, the whole British Empire, might have suffered severely. The Peace Ballot, however, had seemed to show that that was what the British public wanted.

The Government did, in the first instance, make frantic efforts to avoid over-calling its hand. To this end a series of overtures were made to Italy, the idea being to bribe that country to abandon the projected war. The bribes varied, and grew as time went on, but they all visualised the cession of both British and Abyssinian territory to Italy as the price of peace. This policy did not appeal to Mussolini, who was already exasperated by the reluctance of Great Britain to declare any definite line of policy towards his proposed colonial adventure. His suspicions had long been aroused. Now he came to see that he might well have to choose between defiance of the British Empire or the abandonment of his long-cherished ambitions in East Africa.

The realisation gave the Italian dictator furiously to think. In the Suez Canal, England held the artery through which Italian blood would have to flow – and was already flowing in ever-increasing quantities – to East Africa. But did England hold it? Was not the Suez Canal an international waterway in which France,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Italy's friend, was vitally concerned? Was not Italy's position, after a decade of careful preparation, sufficiently strong to defy England in the Mediterranean?

Malta, the chief base of the British Mediterranean Fleet, was a mere sixty miles from Sicily – less than twenty minutes' flight for Italy's new bombing aircraft. The Malta channel, through which all traffic had to pass from the Western Mediterranean to the eastern basin of that sea, was less than 100 miles across from Sicily to Cape Bon – a passage which less than a dozen well-handled submarines could close. Haifa, the fountain of fuel for any British fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean, was within flying distance of Rhodes – a mere 500 miles. Port Said was an even smaller distance from that island. The British grip on the Suez Canal, moreover, depended upon Egypt, which was a prey to nationalistic agitation and could be influenced from Libya. Palestine was full of unrest.

And, apart altogether from the political and strategic considerations, Italy had plenty of excellent aircraft and a fleet specially designed to make the naval domination of the Mediterranean by any other Power a matter of doubt and anxiety.

One can imagine Signor Mussolini sitting in his vast room in the Palazzo Venezia, weighing most carefully the pros and cons of the situation – with the glittering dream of the resurrection of the Roman Empire always before him. Everything seemed to be in his favour, even if he was forced to try conclusions with the might of the British Empire. Everything, that is, except time – the factor which has been the undoing of so many great men. Mussolini knew that he would be successful, even in the face of Great Britain, *for a short time*. Would that time be long enough? That was the crucial question. The Duce did not expect his war in Abyssinia to be brought to a victorious conclusion, as in fact it was, in a mere seven months. His most sanguine estimates for the conquest were in the neighbourhood of two years.

## PRELUDE TO WAR

In the circumstances Mussolini – never, for all his bombast, a man to rush recklessly into commitments to which he could not see a perfectly clear and satisfactory issue – consulted his military advisers. Before doing so, however, he had already worked out a plan of campaign whereby the preparations made with a view to war against Abyssinia could be diverted for war against the British Empire.

The plan consisted of nothing more nor less than simultaneous attacks on Egypt and the Sudan from the south-east and the north-west, while direct attacks by sea and air were delivered against the Nile delta and the Suez Canal.

The attack from the south-east, of course, meant the temporary abandonment of the plans for offensive against Abyssinia. By September 1st the Italian forces in Eritrea were to consist of four full army corps. The First Army Corps and the Second Army Corps each consisted of one regular and one Blackshirt division. The Third Army Corps comprised two divisions of native troops and one Blackshirt division, while the Fourth Army Corps was formed of two divisions of Italian regulars and detachments of Alpini and Guards.

This force of nearly 300,000 men, supported by 300 tanks and 300 aircraft, was to swing right-handed from its initial objective of Abyssinia and drive at the Sudan, where 1,000 miles of frontier were defended by only two battalions of Sudanese troops. The first objective was to be Kassala, and the railway from that place to Port Sudan. The second objective was to be Khartoum, whence the whole of the Nile Valley could be dominated through the medium of its water-supply.

The attack from the north-west would be developed from Libya under the command of Marshal Balbo. The Italian troops and aircraft in Libya had recently been strongly reinforced, and the great majority of the troops were concentrated in the neighbourhood of Jarabub and Port Bardia. These places represented the Italian ends of the only two routes by which an attack by land from Libya



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

could develop against Egypt – the coast road through Matruh, and the tracks linking the oases of Jarabub, Siwa, and Bahariya and leading to the Nile Valley.

The direct attack, by air and sea and the landing of troops, on the delta of the Nile and at the Suez Canal was by far the most audacious in conception, for within the main scheme were measures designed to ensure against the expeditionary force being cut off from its home bases. These measures consisted of nothing less than the annihilation of a great part of the naval forces of the British Empire. The details of this part of the Italian plan were believed, by officers on the spot, to have been as follows. Subsequent events seem to show that they were close to the truth.

Practically the whole of the British Mediterranean Fleet lay at Malta, massed in the narrow harbours between the steep rocky slopes of Valetta and its satellite towns. Malta and the moored fleet were to be subjected to intense air raids carried out in quick succession and without warning. There was little doubt that many of the ships would suffer severe damage in these air raids. Since a warship must have sea-room if it is to give a good account of itself, the Italian plan legislated for the speedy departure from Malta harbour of such ships as were able to leave. These ships, as soon as they reached the open sea, were to be attacked by a large number of submarines. To this end a strong submarine patrol was to be instituted off Malta before the zero-hour for the air raids.

While the Mediterranean Fleet was being destroyed, either by aircraft as it lay helpless at its moorings, or by the Italian submarines as soon as it left harbour, Italian warships and aircraft would raid Egypt and the Suez Canal. These would be followed immediately by an army which was to be already embarked in troopships – ostensibly for service in East Africa.

The Italian plan was believed to go even further. Mussolini must have known that, even if he succeeded in destroying practically the whole of the British

## PRELUDE TO WAR

Mediterranean Fleet, he would by no means have finished with the might of the British Empire. British reinforcements would come both from the west and from the east. He would have to keep these at bay if he wished to complete his victory without serious risk of disaster.

Strategically and materially he was in an excellent position to prevent British reinforcements reaching Egypt. Any reinforcements from the north and west would have to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, and any reinforcements from the south or east would have to pass through the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, at the southern end of the Red Sea. For the virtual closing of these two narrow waterways the submarine was the ideal weapon. Mussolini had plenty of submarines at his disposal – sixty-four, to be exact – and at least half a dozen of these were already in the southern part of the Red Sea. Although submarine patrols in the Straits of Gibraltar and Bab el Mandeb might not be able to prevent entirely the passage of British ships, and although submarine losses would be inevitable, the patrols would constitute a grave threat and would almost certainly inflict serious losses.

With the British Mediterranean Fleet disposed of, and with the gates closed by submarines against the free passage of reinforcements, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea would become twin Italian lakes, upon which Italian arms could pursue an uninterrupted way to victory. The gigantic conception of the plan was a measure of the stature of the man who held in his hands not only the destiny of Italy, but of the greater part of the civilised world. It was Napoleonic, and it is significant that Napoleon is Mussolini's greatest hero.

The existence of such a plan seems to have been known to Great Britain almost as soon as it was drafted. Whether this was due to the efficiency of the British Secret Service or to leakage from Italy through France will probably never be known. Perhaps the British knowledge had been acquired by putting two and two together after the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

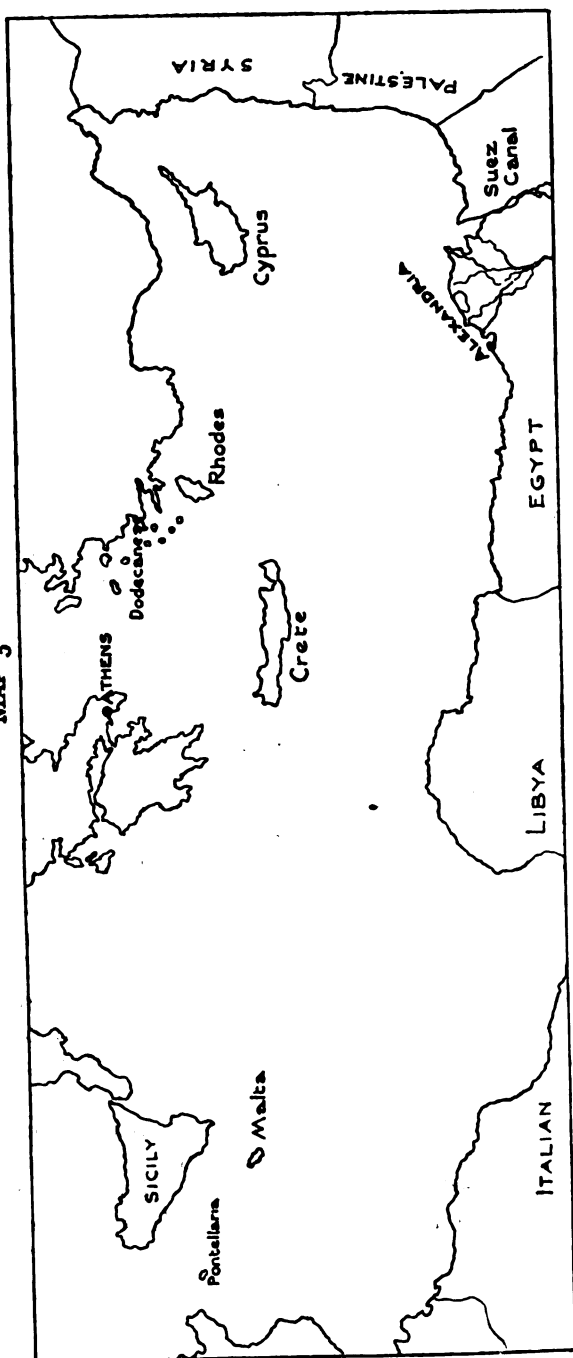
jesting indiscretion of Marshal Balbo, who told English journalists, after the conclusion of the Italian Army manœuvres south of the Brenner Pass, that he was returning to Libya to prepare to fight the British. But it appears Great Britain also knew that the plan, if adopted, would be put into operation on August 30th, and this knowledge could hardly have been achieved by deduction.

Even with this knowledge, there was little enough that could be done. Time was short, and it was all-important that precautions should not be ostentatious. There was obvious danger of the crisis being precipitated by the taking of too evident precautions.

The problem was to stave off the crisis, for no man knew what the outcome might be. Both Great Britain and France were pre-occupied with Germany, where conscription had been re-introduced, and where armaments were being piled up with alarming speed. War in the Mediterranean would mean the loss of some naval units – then where would be the preponderance of strength over Germany which the British Government had recently sought to perpetuate by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 18th, 1935?

Obvious military or naval preparations in the Mediterranean, moreover, might have led to the charge that England was acting in her own interests, rather than in accordance with the principle of collective security and under the leadership of the League of Nations. Particularly was this to be avoided because the League was hanging back under the braking effect applied by France. If England were charged with self-interest rather than devotion to an ideal, there was no knowing what might happen, either at Geneva or at home. At home, public opinion, which, actuated by pacifist idealism, had already forced a dangerous policy upon the Government, might crystallise again and demand something even worse. Even as it was, the wits of Geneva said that in British eyes "S.d.N." stood, not for "Société des Nations," but for "Source du Nil."

MAP 3





## PRELUDE TO WAR

There was in British Government circles a deep-rooted conviction that the Italian plan would never be put into operation, since it was understood that it was designed only as a retaliatory measure in case England should try to close the Suez Canal – an action which the British Government did not seriously contemplate. Only small precautionary measures were, therefore, taken, and these were such that they could be characterised as perfectly normal and having no bearing upon Italian intentions.

A small number of troops was assembled and warned for foreign service. It was emphasised that this was being done in accordance with the Government decision to increase the garrisons of Malta and Aden, which had been taken before the Italo-Abyssinian dispute arose, and had been outlined in the White Paper on Defence issued in March, and in the Army Estimates for the year.

The most necessary precaution was to provide for the removal of the Mediterranean Fleet from Malta. It would obviously have been useless to move the Fleet any considerable time before the date on which the Italian plan was to be put into operation – *if* it was to be put into operation. Such a movement would excite suspicion and give Italy time, if she desired it, to alter her plan in order to meet the changed conditions.

The Admiralty arranged for the Mediterranean Fleet to leave Malta on August 29th for a cruise. The programmes of such cruises are usually known in advance, and are issued to the Press so soon as the Foreign Office has secured the permission of foreign Governments for British warships to visit ports in their territory which are included in the cruise programme. In this case the programme of the cruise – the Second Summer Cruise of the Mediterranean Fleet – was not made public. Nor was indication of the date of departure of the main units from Malta given to any foreign Government apart from Egypt, for the whole of the first part of the cruise was to be concerned with ports in Egypt, Palestine, and

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Cyprus. The fleet was not scheduled to visit any foreign port until the middle of October, when it was to assemble in Navarino Bay prior to returning to Malta. By that time the crisis, if it ever arose, would be past.

In the latter part of July 1935 Mussolini sent a draft of his plan for retaliation against Great Britain, and attack on Egypt, out to Eritrea to be studied and remarked upon by General De Bono. The old general, always cautious, disapproved entirely of any attempt to try conclusions with the British Empire. Abyssinia could be conquered by Italy, but with adventures against Egypt and the Sudan he would have nothing to do. He was convinced that to swing the projected offensive against Abyssinia so as to attack the Sudan would be to invite disaster.

Baron Franchetti left Eritrea for Rome about this time, and there appears to be ground for the belief that he was sent by De Bono to emphasise to Mussolini the danger of his plan. Baron Franchetti was an explorer. He was one of the few white men with an intimate knowledge of that obscure corner of Africa where the frontiers of Eritrea, Abyssinia, and the Sudan meet. For months before he went to Rome he had been active in Abyssinia. He had not only been exploring. He also had the political mission of winning over the tribes to Italian allegiance, or, at least, of fomenting friction between them and the central Government at Addis Ababa.

There followed a series of events which has become known as the "Story of the Black Box." Whether this is true it is impossible to say. Its truth was, and is, implicitly believed by British officers and officials who served in the Mediterranean and around its coasts during the crisis. Certain facts are incontestable; and they fit into the history of those days with a neatness which prompts belief. At its best the "Story of the Black Box" is one of the most dramatic episodes in history; at its worst it provides an interesting sidelight

## PRELUDE TO WAR

upon the "war mentality" existing in and around the middle sea at that time.

The story is that Mussolini was convinced by the protests of De Bono of the danger of his plan for action against the British Empire. He answered De Bono's objections at length, and he assured the general in command in Eritrea that the plan of action against Great Britain would not be adopted unless British opposition to the Abyssinian campaign went to the length of closing the Suez Canal. At the same time he asked that further consideration should be given to certain points, in case action against Great Britain should be forced upon Italy. To assist in this further consideration, and to ensure that De Bono, in far-away Eritrea, should have a true conception of the political influences building up in Europe, Mussolini sent Signor Ruzza with Baron Franchetti back to Eritrea with his detailed reply to De Bono.

Signor Ruzza was a personal and confidential friend of Signor Mussolini. He had been one of the handful of men who had been at Mussolini's side as long ago as 1909. He took with him on his journey to Eritrea his private secretary.

Baron Franchetti and Signor Ruzza travelled in an Italian F.81 aeroplane—a small liner which, on this occasion, was not plying for commercial purposes. The machine landed at Cairo on the afternoon of Monday, August 5th, 1935. It left Cairo for Eritrea early on the following morning in fair weather, and at 5.31 a.m. it was in touch by wireless with the Rome airport. Then it disappeared. On August 8th a search by air for the missing aircraft was instituted, and on that day the wreckage was discovered, a mere fifteen miles from Cairo, by a Royal Air Force machine operating from Heliopolis.

The Italian machine had crashed badly, and all six of the occupants—Baron Franchetti, Signor Ruzza and his secretary, the pilot, assistant pilot, and the wireless operator—had been killed outright.



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

In the wreckage of the machine, so goes the story, was found a small black despatch-box. This was taken to Cairo and handed to the authorities on August 9th. The authorities, seeing that it contained important documents, handed it over to Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner in Egypt. It was obvious that the documents ought to be placed in the hands of the British Government with the least possible delay. On the morning of August 10th, Mr. T. Campbell Black, the record-breaking long-distance airman, left England for Cairo. He was, it was stated, setting out on an attempt on the record from England to Capetown. He broke the existing record from England to Cairo, and landed at Heliopolis on the same afternoon. It looked as if he was well on the way to his goal of beating the record to the Cape. Immediately on his arrival at Heliopolis, however, it was given out that he was abandoning the attempt on the Cape record on account of engine trouble. The trouble did not seem to be serious, for early next morning he left Heliopolis and flew non-stop back to England. Mr. Campbell Black's machine was the only one available which was capable of flying non-stop from Egypt to England.

The British Government now knew that the crisis was even more remote, since Mussolini did not propose to put his plan for retaliatory action against Great Britain into operation unless Great Britain closed the Suez Canal, or declared that such was her intention. Any action so determined was far from the thoughts of the Government, influenced as it was by the advice of the Chiefs of Staffs of the three Fighting Services. These were unanimous in stating that war in the Mediterranean would be a disaster, and the Admiralty added in no uncertain terms that it could not afford to risk losing valuable ships in a struggle to maintain the ideal which had led to its weakness.

The way out of the impasse now seemed clear. All that had to be done was to support the League of Nations with words and to refuse to move further in its support

## PRELUDE TO WAR

than all the other nations were prepared to do – and at all costs refuse to be jockeyed into such insanity as closing the Suez Canal.

But once again the strength of the anti-Italian and pro-League feeling in Great Britain was to jeopardise peace. This feeling had been growing stronger and stronger. It had received a great fillip in the declaration of the results of the Peace Ballot, and it was being nourished by ceaseless propaganda from printing-press and pulpit. Mussolini was becoming, in the public view, more and more the arch-villain of the world, and the primitive and lawless Abyssinia was coming to be regarded as a civilised but downtrodden State, entitled, if need be, to the support of the whole strength of the British Empire. More important still, the belief was growing that if Italy was not prevented from embarking upon her contemplated aggression in Abyssinia the world would be plunged into chaos and war. The voices of the realists who, although they had every respect for international law, saw this philosophy as it really was – completely back-to-front – were heeded less and less.

In the circumstances the talk was all of closing the Suez Canal. This action was vociferously demanded in England. In Geneva the Research Centre was busily studying the legal aspect of whether the League of Nations could close the Suez Canal. The study was being conducted, ironically enough, by an American – Mr. Raymond Leslie Berell, President of the American Foreign Policy Association.

Mr. George Martelli, in his book *Italy Against the World*, has written: "Talk of closing the Suez Canal, which was common in England during the summer, had provoked violent reactions in the Italian Press. It was openly stated that if England took any such step she must not expect Italy to accept it with resignation."

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who had remained in London during August as

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Minister in Attendance, saw the King on August 21st. By that time the power of the Sanctionists had become so strong that it could no longer be ignored. On August 22nd a special meeting of the Cabinet was held to discuss the situation, and Ministers were recalled from their holidays to attend. Even in the Cabinet the "support the League at all costs" school had its advocates. These, it was widely believed, were headed by Mr. Neville Chamberlain, the present Prime Minister, who urged that the League of Nations should be supported to the lengths of closing the Suez Canal to Italian ships, and the institution of an armed blockade of Italy with the British Navy.

None of these events was lost upon Mussolini. He well knew that unless he could prevent the closing of the Suez Canal he would find himself in a perilous position. In Eritrea there were supplies for the Army for only six months, and – more important still – only sufficient petrol for two months. Mussolini did not believe that his armies could complete their conquest of Abyssinia in six months, particularly if they were deprived of air forces, tanks, and motor transport by lack of fuel.

A man of the stamp of Mussolini will, if he finds himself cornered with everything at stake, tend to attack first and stake his all on a desperate attempt at victory. This is what Napoleon did. It was what Mussolini tried to do. He fell back upon his plan for action against England. This he did in spite of the entreaties of France, one of whose elder statesmen told the Duce quite frankly that, although his plan might make him master of the Mediterranean for a few months, after that time the pressure which would be exerted by the British Empire would lead to the disintegration, not only of his cherished dreams of a new Roman Empire, but of Italy herself.

Thus the last week in August 1935 found the threat of a general conflagration in Europe more ominous and nearer. And the British Mediterranean Fleet was the pivot about which the war clouds rolled.

## CHAPTER XI

### FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

State of Britain's threatened fleet – plans for retaliation – how did England know Mussolini's intentions? – British action not connected with Geneva – Mussolini forestalled – reinforcements for the Mediterranean – war conditions

TOWARDS THE END OF AUGUST 1935 the greater part of the Mediterranean Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sir William Fisher, lay at Malta. It was still a weakened fleet. The battleship H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* had gone to Portsmouth to recommission, and the Commander-in-Chief's flag was therefore flying in H.M.S. *Resolution*. There was no aircraft carrier with the fleet. H.M.S. *Eagle*, which had replaced H.M.S. *Glorious* temporarily in the Mediterranean, had returned to England in the spring and been reduced to reserve at Devonport. H.M.S. *Glorious* was also at home. She had been refitted and recommissioned on July 23rd. This ship was, however, due to leave Portsmouth on August 21st to rejoin the Mediterranean Fleet. Only two of the three destroyer flotillas of the Mediterranean Fleet were with the Commander-in-Chief. The Third Flotilla had recently been recommissioned in England and was "working up" at Gibraltar.

On August 20th there was a notable addition to the Mediterranean Fleet, when H.M.S. *Arethusa* arrived to become flagship of the Third Cruiser Squadron. H.M.S. *Arethusa* is a fairly small cruiser, displacing 5,220 tons and mounting six 6-inch guns. She was, however, a brand new ship, having been commissioned for the first

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

time on June 12th at Chatham – the port at which she had been built. Being a new ship, she had a far more effective anti-aircraft armament than the older cruisers in the Mediterranean. This consisted of four 4-inch quick-firing anti-aircraft guns and two sets of multi-barrelled machine guns of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch calibre. The other 6-inch gun cruisers in the Mediterranean carried only three 4-inch anti-aircraft guns of an older pattern and no multiple machine guns.

On August 23rd the Third Destroyer Flotilla left Gibraltar to join the Fleet at Malta. On the following day the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Glorious*, accompanied by her attendant destroyer H.M.S. *Searcher*, arrived at Gibraltar. Two days later they also left Gibraltar to join Sir William Fisher at Malta. The Third Destroyer Flotilla arrived at Malta on August 26th and spent the next two days fuelling and embarking stores, torpedoes, and ammunition. H.M.S. *Glorious* and H.M.S. *Searcher* arrived at Malta on August 28th – the day before the Fleet was to leave.

Thus the Mediterranean Fleet received substantial reinforcements – amounting to one aircraft carrier, one new cruiser, a flotilla leader, and seven destroyers (the Third Flotilla was one ship short) – during the ten days prior to leaving Malta.

Admiral Sir William Fisher was glad to receive these other ships, and particularly the aircraft carrier, but he had no misgivings. He knew of the Italian plan for action against Great Britain, but he also knew that it had been virtually abandoned. In any case he had made such plans as he could without exciting suspicion and comment, which would have led to a further deterioration of the international situation.

Officers who were at Malta during those days aver that the British Commander-in-Chief was quite prepared for an Italian aeroplane to drop a bomb on Malta, and give him an opportunity to put his counter-attacking plan

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

into immediate effect. This, it was said, included the institution of a blockade of the Suez Canal, in order to cut off the Italian armies in Eritrea from their sources of supply, and the bombardment of a number of Italian coastal towns – notably the naval dockyard port of Spezia.

It would appear that the British naval Commander-in-Chief did not set great store by the Italian submarine patrols which were to be set round Malta before any bombing was carried out. This was due neither to lack of appreciation of the risk involved nor to foolhardiness. Rather was it due to realisation of the capabilities of the forces at his command. The destroyer flotillas of the Mediterranean Fleet were all fitted with the latest secret devices for detecting submarines. The devices had been discovered during the struggle to find adequate means to defeat the submarine menace presented by Germany during the Great War. Ever since the war, experiments had been carried out which had led to the devices reaching a high pitch of perfection, and they had been tried out successfully in hundreds of exercises.

Moreover, the water in the neighbourhood of Malta is so clear that, unless the surface of the water is much disturbed by bad weather, a submerged submarine is visible to aircraft unless it is at a great depth. Sir William Fisher knew that the Italian submarines were for the most part not capable of operating at great depths, and that, if they were on patrol hoping to intercept an enemy, they would have to operate close to the surface so as to be able to see through their periscopes. Under such conditions there was every chance that an air patrol could establish the existence and positions of any patrolling submarines. Both aircraft and destroyers could make their lives exceedingly perilous. More important still, once the positions of the patrolling submarines were known the fleet could avoid them. A submarine has, when submerged, a very low speed and an extremely limited radius of action. It is therefore a matter of

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

simplicity, if the position of a submarine is known at any time, for a surface ship to calculate how far off that position she must pass in order to be safe from attack.

On August 29th Admiral Sir William Fisher left Malta with his whole fleet and steamed south-eastwards. Exercises were carried out which entailed the fleet steaming under war conditions.

The way in which the British Government came to hear, at this critical moment, that Mussolini was again contemplating action against Great Britain remains a mystery. The story which is widely believed by naval officers who served through those stormy days is, however, worth recording, for experience teaches that Service gossip which is given credence in the fleet is almost always at least founded on fact. This story is as follows:

A certain highly placed personage in the Italian aristocracy knew of Mussolini's intentions. He had scant sympathy with the Fascist regime when it rushed headlong into grandiose schemes of imperialism, but he had a great love for Great Britain. Nor did he wish to see his native land submerged by a major war. He is said to have informed Whitehall that Mussolini had reverted to his plan for drastic action against Great Britain, since Great Britain, in the rôle of champion of the League of Nations, constituted a serious threat to Italian aims. The warning – so goes the tale – was given seventeen hours before the zero-hour fixed by the Duce, at the moment the Mediterranean Fleet was leaving the Grand Harbour of Valetta, which, in Mussolini's imagination, was to become its death-trap.

The story goes on to say that *Il Duce* nearly had a stroke when he heard that the Mediterranean Fleet was at sea and that his cherished plan had miscarried by its being anticipated by a few hours. Nevertheless, he remained a realist, with a complete grasp over the whole gigantic scheme. Failure could be rendered less damaging

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

to the all-important prestige of a dictator by making sure that no signs of failure appeared. The wireless crackled code messages to General De Bono in Eritrea and to Marshal Balbo in Libya – to submarines approaching Malta and the Straits of Gibraltar and Bab el Mandeb. All orders were cancelled and no action whatsoever was to be taken against Great Britain.

Whether that tale of the wardrooms of the fleet and of the officers' messes of the Army and Royal Air Force be true or not, there is no denying the fact that, on August 30th, 1935, the Admiralty, War Office, and Air Ministry became suddenly galvanised into such action as one associates only with imminent war.

There could have been no connection between the sudden activities of Whitehall and the League at Geneva. The League was still busily engaged in losing the necessity for decision in a maze of committees. It was not until September 11th – twelve days later – that Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, made his famous speech at Geneva which, it was stated in *The Times*, "would rank high as an authoritative and historic declaration of British policy."

In this speech Sir Samuel Hoare emphasised that "no selfish or imperialist motives enter into our minds at all," and he aligned Great Britain with the League as follows: "The League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression."

Curious words, in view of what was happening in the Mediterranean. The phrase "in its entirety" could only mean one thing – readiness to go the whole hog and embark upon military sanctions if necessary. Yet in the same speech it was said that "if risks for peace are to be run, they must be run by all. The security of the many cannot be ensured solely by the efforts of a few, however powerful they may be."



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Many considered that those two sentences were designed to bring home to an acutely embarrassed France her obligations under the League Covenant—obligations which, in her new-found friendship with Italy, she was most anxious to avoid. There is no denying, however, that Great Britain had taken strong action in the Mediterranean without any behest of the League, which would have played a far smaller part in the dispute had it not been for the determined leadership given at Geneva by Sir Samuel Hoare and Mr. Anthony Eden.

Whitehall on August 30th, 1935, set about what amounted to a partial mobilisation of all three of the Fighting Services. The telephone lines between the Admiralty and the naval ports of Chatham, Portsmouth, Devonport, and Rosyth were overcrowded with consultations and orders. Arrangements were made for the immediate "bringing forward" of ships in reserve, so that they would be ready for active service at a moment's notice. Merchant vessels were chartered as store carriers and loaded with the hundreds of requirements of a fleet operating under war conditions three thousand miles from its main bases. Naval officers were ordered hither and thither at a moment's notice, with vague orders to "get such and such ready" and even vaguer ideas of the conditions they were likely to find. On more than one occasion an officer arrived at a port with orders to get some ship ready for sea "with all despatch" only to find on his arrival that no officers or men were available. The dockyards were being so rushed with work that no amount of cajoling could persuade them to undertake more.

H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, the usual flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet, which was at Portsmouth to re-commission, was sent to the Mediterranean again without recommissioning. Men were short, and the times were not such as to justify replacement of a fully efficient battleship's crew with a new complement,

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

which would need "shaking down" before it could be considered truly efficient.

The aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Courageous* was at Portsmouth. She immediately embarked a full complement of aircraft. It was given out that she was to leave Portsmouth for Portland, where flying exercises were to be carried out. This was generally believed, and the wives of some officers in H.M.S. *Courageous* actually went to Weymouth so that they would be able to see something of their husbands in the intervals of the "flying exercises."

H.M.S. *Courageous* left Portsmouth on September 1st. Her orders were secret and explicit. She was to proceed direct to Alexandria at high speed. She was not to call at any port on the way, and she was to arrange her passage so that it should be carried out with the greatest possible secrecy. For this reason she avoided the recognised trade routes, and steamed far out into the Atlantic before turning south for the latitude of Gibraltar.

The Admiralty was, apparently, convinced that the Italian plan for the closing of the Straits of Gibraltar by patrols of submarines had already been put into effect. H.M.S. *Courageous*, which had unaccountably missed Portland and the "flying exercises," steamed at high speed until she reached the approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar, which she did at night. There she reduced speed, for the bow-wave and stern-wave and wake of a large ship steaming at high speed are visible on the darkest night. With the ship darkened and not even navigation lights showing, H.M.S. *Courageous* crept through the Straits of Gibraltar, making as little disturbance of the water as possible. The story goes that in Whitehall most of the Board of Admiralty sat up all that night in a fever of apprehension.

As soon as the aircraft carrier was clear of the area in which Italian submarine patrols were expected, she again increased speed to over twenty-five knots. The following night the same procedure was carried out while the ship

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

passed through the Malta channel, in which Italian submarines might be expected.

H.M.S. *Courageous* arrived at Alexandria on September 4th, having covered the distance of three thousand odd miles from Portsmouth in three and a half days.

Meanwhile, elaborate precautions had been taken at Gibraltar and Malta. Both these places were "blacked out" at night. Apparently air raids or bombardments from the sea were expected. There was also a fear of attacks on the harbours of these two places by submarines and the fast motor torpedo craft which Italy had at her disposal. To guard against such attacks, anti-submarine nets and boom defences were being rapidly prepared. The first of these defences to be put in place was that across the entrance to the Grand Harbour at Malta. This was ready and in place on September 3rd, and the war routine of an examination service was brought into force, no ship being permitted to enter the harbour without official authorisation. Nets and boom defences were also being prepared at Alexandria, which was to be the main base of the Mediterranean Fleet throughout the Italo-Abyssinian War.

There were many other movements of warships during the first days of September, all of which were designed to strengthen the position in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. The British Empire is so placed strategically that these two seas form the central links in the great chain of Empire maritime communications and naval defence. From both sides of these central links reinforcements gravitated towards the threatened centre. Like Lars Porsena of Clusium in days of old, the British Admiralty sent messages east and west and south and north to summon its array.

The light cruiser H.M.S. *Colombo* arrived at Berbera, the chief port of British Somaliland, on August 30th. This ship was on her way back to England from the East Indies Station, where she had been stationed during the

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

refit of H.M.S. *Emerald*. Her homeward voyage was interrupted, and she was ordered to remain at Berbera and watch developments.

From China came the large 8-inch gun cruiser H.M.S. *Berwick* and the minelaying cruiser H.M.S. *Adventure* – a ship capable of laying 340 mines “at a sitting.” From China, also, came four destroyers of the *Defender* class, and four large submarines; while the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Hermes* and another division of destroyers moved south to Singapore, in order to be closer to the centre in case further reinforcements should prove necessary.

The cruiser H.M.S. *Emerald*, which belonged to the East Indies Station but which had been at home refitting, was kept in the Red Sea instead of proceeding direct to her station base at Colombo.

From the America and West Indies Station the cruisers H.M.S. *Exeter* and H.M.S. *Ajax* steamed across the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. H.M.S. *Ajax* came from Bermuda. H.M.S. *Exeter* came round Cape Horn from Valparaiso, on the west coast of South America. This ship had the longest passage to the threatened area, and she steamed at high speed all the way. She had to come so far and so fast that there was anxiety about her fuel. In the Atlantic her captain inquired into the amount of fuel remaining, and asked whether it was sufficient to take the ship non-stop to Alexandria. The engineer commander replied that the fuel would carry the ship to Alexandria, but he might not be able to go astern to check the way of the ship when she got there! Actually, H.M.S. *Exeter* reached Alexandria with less than twenty tons of fuel in her tanks – about one per cent of her full stowage.

From England there were, of course, large reinforcements. The battleship H.M.S. *Barham* was commissioned at Devonport on August 30th and left immediately for the Mediterranean. During September and October this ship was moored in Port Said at the entrance to the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Suez Canal in such a way that her bows pointed across the Canal entrance, and a movement of less than fifty yards would have completely blocked the Canal.

From Devonport there also went the Second Submarine Flotilla of the Home Fleet, consisting of four submarines and the depot ship H.M.S. *Lucia*. This submarine flotilla went to Aden, where it watched the southern entrance to the Red Sea. More than one of the submarines of this flotilla were undergoing repairs when sailing orders were received. There could be no delay, however. Repairs were rushed through by day and night work, and all but the bare necessities dispensed with. The flotilla was barely ready for sea, and, in the opinion of many, certainly not fit for active service, when it left Devonport.

Again, the orders were that the passage to the danger area was to be carried out with the utmost secrecy. The sudden feverish activity of the Admiralty and the other Defence Departments; the day and night work imposed upon dockyards and upon officers and men; the stress laid upon speed and on secrecy – these all combined to create a “war atmosphere” in which excess of zeal might have led to hasty and unwise decisions. The submarines of the Second Submarine Flotilla had their identification numbers painted out, and orders were issued to the effect that foreign colours were to be hoisted if the submarines, which were to make the passage on the surface in the interests of greater speed, fell in with shipping. The hoisting of foreign colours is a well-known *ruse de guerre* which is permitted under international law. It might well, however, have further complicated an international situation which was already critical. Moreover, the *ruse de guerre* of false colours could hardly hope to be effective. It was known that no other naval Power was taking action in support of the League of Nations against Italy, and one of the submarines concerned had a most distinctive silhouette and could not possibly be

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

mistaken for a foreign submarine even at a distance of several miles.

In the event, however, foreign ensigns were never displayed, and the voyage of the submarine flotilla to Aden was carried out without incident.

From England also went that most useful vessel in such circumstances, H.M.S. *Guardian*, then the only specially designed net-layer in existence.

The gravitation of the whole of the Mediterranean Fleet and its reinforcements to the eastern basin of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea left the neighbourhood of Gibraltar denuded of warships. This defect was remedied by the departure from England of the battle cruisers H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Renown*, and the Second Cruiser Squadron consisting of three ships of the *Leander* class. This force became based on Gibraltar, where it was in a position to guard the straits and the western basin of the Mediterranean, and was a thousand miles nearer to the Mediterranean Fleet should that force require further reinforcement.

H.M.S. *Hood* is the largest warship afloat, and her presence at the entrance to the Mediterranean had more effect upon the general public in Italy than all the other British fleet movements. A British journalist resident in Rome at this time had a small lead water-line model of H.M.S. *Hood* which he used to carry about in his pocket. Everywhere he went he was met by complaints and vociferous arguments about the iniquitous actions of the British Navy. When the argument became too heated, he used quietly to draw the model of H.M.S. *Hood* from his pocket and look at it contemplatively. That he never came to harm is a tribute to the forbearance of the average Italian during those difficult times.

In view of the large number of submarines possessed by Italy, the cry in the Mediterranean was always – as it had been during the Great War – for more destroyers, and yet more destroyers. To meet this demand the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Second, Fifth, and Sixth Destroyer Flotillas of the Home Fleet were sent to the Mediterranean. The Fifth and Sixth Destroyer Flotillas were full flotillas consisting of a flotilla leader and eight destroyers, but the Second Flotilla consisted only of a flotilla leader and four destroyers—a relic of the action taken by the Labour Government in 1929 in cutting the destroyer-building programme for that year by half.

The Dominions were also active in sending reinforcements to the threatened links in the chain of Empire communications. The large cruiser H.M.A.S. *Australia* of the Royal Australian Navy was already serving with the Mediterranean Fleet, under the scheme whereby an exchange of cruisers between the two navies takes place periodically for training purposes, and to ensure uniformity between the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy. The British cruiser H.M.S. *Sussex*, which had taken the Duke of Gloucester to Australia for the centenary celebrations, had remained in Australian waters as “exchange cruiser” and had become for one year a unit of the Royal Australian Navy. H.M.S. *Sussex* was sent from Australia to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet, while the new Australian cruiser, H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, was placed at the disposal of the Admiralty as soon as she was completed. She joined the force at Gibraltar. From the New Zealand Division the cruiser *Diomedé* was detached to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet.

The Admiralty was by no means the only Defence Department to rush reinforcements to the Mediterranean. The Air Ministry gave orders for twenty squadrons of aircraft to be sent out to the Eastern Mediterranean. The transport *Neuralia* left Southampton on September 3rd with a large detachment of Royal Marines. The transport *Bellerophon* took a shipload of artillery equipment to Malta. The transports *Nevassa* and *Somersetshire* arrived at Malta not long afterwards, on their way to the Eastern Mediterranean with British troops,

## FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

while other transports were being prepared and loaded.

It is interesting to note that Kemal Ataturk, who had given Great Britain so much trouble in the Near East some years before, is stated to have offered to put an army of 800,000 fighting men into the field as Britain's ally, should this be necessary.

The effort made by the British Empire in the early autumn of 1935 was immense. It did not have any immediate connection either with Italy's conquest of Abyssinia or with the imposition of sanctions against Italy by the League of Nations. The British effort began in earnest on August 30th. The advance guards of the Italian army in Eritrea did not cross the Abyssinian frontier until the early morning of October 3rd. Sanctions were not imposed until November 5th. The Co-ordinating Committee set up at Geneva to consider the application of sanctions did not even meet until October 11th, the day on which the Italian aggression in Abyssinia was formally condemned by the League of Nations. It was at the meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee on October 11th that Mr. Anthony Eden made his first proposal – for the lifting of the arms embargo against Abyssinia. The first real sanction proposal – that for the prohibition of loans and credits – was made by Mr. Eden, and adopted by the Committee of Eighteen, on October 16th.



## CHAPTER XII

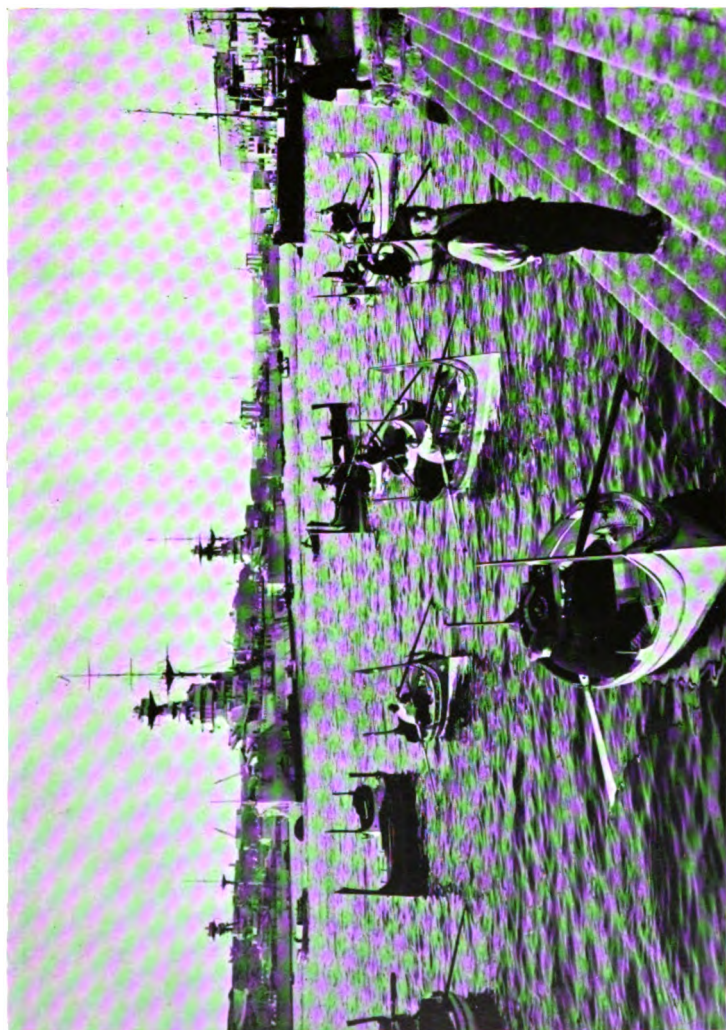
### BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

Italian submarines off Malta – submarines off Alexandria – British unpreparedness – destroyers – minesweepers – lack of men – lack of stores – shortage of ammunition – “sealed lips” and a museum piece

THAT THE EFFORT MADE by the British Empire in September 1935 to strengthen her grip upon the most vulnerable parts of the great Eastern trade route was dictated by very grave emergency there can be no doubt. No nation, least of all Great Britain, would have taken such hurried and drastic steps had not the threat been real and the need pressing.

Mussolini may have changed his mind about action against Great Britain when he discovered that the Mediterranean Fleet was already at sea on its way to Alexandria. He may have issued an immediate recall to any submarines in the Straits of Gibraltar or on their way there. Italian submarines were, however, actively watching the approaches to the Grand Harbour of Valetta.

The presence of these submarines was reported to the British naval authorities by patrolling aircraft. Such submarine patrols could not be allowed to continue. They might at any moment lead to an incident which would touch off the powder magazine upon which the peace of Europe was so precariously balanced. An incident, moreover, might occur without ever being planned or authorised. The temptation to fire a torpedo might prove too strong for some zealous Italian submarine officer, or a submarine might be careless enough to get rammed and sunk by a British ship. The problem was to secure



Malta – H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* and other ships in the Grand Harbour –  
*dghajisas* in the foreground



## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

the rapid removal of the Italian submarine patrols without causing an immediate international conflagration.

The Italian submarines were patrolling in areas habitually used by British warships for carrying out exercises. These areas were known to the naval authorities of Italy and every other Mediterranean Power. A division of destroyers was sent to sea from Malta in order to carry out depth-charge exercises in the area in question. Only small dummy depth-charges were used, and the destroyers were given definite orders not to drop these too close to the lurking submarines, the position of which had been accurately established by air reconnaissance.

The explosion below water of even a small charge sounds very loud in a submerged submarine. Such explosions might easily be mistaken for the real thing by personnel who had never experienced real depth-charge attack. Moreover, the submarines did not know that the destroyers were aware of their presence and had been ordered not to drop charges too close to them. The moral effect of under-water explosions on the personnel of a submerged submarine is very great, particularly if the personnel believes that at any moment an explosion may take place close alongside the hull of their unseen craft.

The Italian submarines, knowing that, however grave the international situation, Italy was not at war with England, did the only possible thing. They came to the surface and protested. In the words of a famous Admiral of the Fleet, they "started popping up like corks."

The commanding officers of the British destroyers pointed out by signal that they did not know that the Italian submarines were there and that, in fact, they had no right to be there. The Italians expressed surprise at an unaccountable error in their navigation, and explained that they had thought that they were off Tripoli, some 200 miles away to the south-south-west. After expressions of mutual regret the Italian submarines departed,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

convinced that, whether authorised or not, patrols off Malta were not healthy.

Italian submarines were also active off Alexandria, where lay the main body of the British Fleet. On one occasion an Italian submarine was reported to be "shadowing" a British aircraft carrier when she left Alexandria. On another occasion one of the Fleet Air Arm aircraft employed on anti-submarine air patrol duties off the harbour distinctly saw a submerged submarine close to the harbour entrance. The submarine, which could not possibly have belonged to any country but Italy, was passing through one of the patches of clear blue water which alternate with the muddy water from the mouths of the Nile. Before any action could be taken against this submarine it had disappeared into the muddy water.

The submarine could not possibly have pleaded legitimate occupation, since it was well inside Egyptian territorial waters, where it had no right to be without the permission of the Egyptian Government – a permission which certainly had not been obtained.

On March 27th, 1936, Admiral Cavagnari, the Italian Under-Secretary of State for the Navy, made a speech to the Senate excusing reticence regarding Italy's naval programme by the persistence of "the Nordic fog hiding the horizon." He alluded to the story of Italian submarines being brought to the surface off Malta by British depth-charge "experiments," and declared: "Our submarines carry out, and have always carried out, their exercises in home waters or in the open sea – *in mare nullius*."

The tremendous and speedy concentration of force achieved by the British Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean proved successful in that a major conflict was averted. There are still those who hold that the effort made by Great Britain was worth while for a totally different reason – that it proved to the world that Great

## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

Britain stood for the ideal of universal law and order implicit in the Covenant of the League of Nations.

The chief result was a belated recognition by the people of Great Britain that their country could play no important part in international affairs, whether on behalf of the League of Nations or not, unless it possessed armed force of adequate strength in a state of preparedness for any emergency. It was this realisation which made possible the British rearmament programme. For this reason one has heard the dictator of Italy hailed as the saviour of the British Empire. History may well prove that this estimation of *Il Duce* is neither ironic nor an overstatement.

It took time, of course, for the general public in Great Britain to realise the magnitude of the effort required in order to withstand a threat from a Power which was, after all, in the second rank. The public did not immediately appreciate the two great truths which lay behind that effort – that the scale of the effort and its cost had been magnified by unpreparedness; and that the threat had forced the British Empire virtually to denude its other commitments of the defensive strength due to them. The Mediterranean crisis showed the danger of unpreparedness and the fallacy of too low a standard of naval strength for an Empire with world-wide commitments.

The unpreparedness of Great Britain in 1935 was a legacy of the old Cabinet decision that ten years of peace could be predicted with certainty. When the prophecy was made it seemed sound enough, but it was never modified in accordance with changing conditions. From being a shrewd appreciation of the international situation, it had become an excuse for allowing economy to replace safety – and bring the British Empire to “the edge of risk.”

It has been said that requirements in the Mediterranean included a large reinforcement of destroyers in order to cope with the potential menace of sixty-four

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Italian submarines. The immediate reinforcements sent to the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea area consisted of a flotilla and a half from the Home Fleet and half a flotilla from the China Squadron. Another flotilla from the Home Fleet went to Gibraltar. In addition, a new flotilla was made up at home and sent to join Admiral Sir William Fisher. This was the Nineteenth Destroyer Flotilla. It consisted of the following ships: *H.M.S. Douglas, Mackay, Valorous, Viceroy, Vega, Wessex, Worcester, Venetia, Torrid, Thruster, Rowena, and Wolsey*. It was thus an over-strength flotilla of heterogeneous vessels. The ships were drawn from such duties as "emergency destroyers" at the naval ports, "tenders" to the torpedo and gunnery schools, and the anti-submarine training flotilla. The Nineteenth Destroyer Flotilla, in fact, represented all the ships which were immediately available and ready for sea when the threat of war arose.

These reinforcements brought the total number of destroyers in the danger area up to fifty-nine ships. When one considers the vast area involved, the widely separated commitments, and the fact that it takes more than one destroyer successfully to hunt one submarine, it is easy to understand that anxiety over destroyers continued.

The destroyer reinforcements for the Mediterranean left the Home Fleet in the extraordinary circumstances of having with it only one single destroyer of an old type – and that ship was doing duty as attendant destroyer to the aircraft carrier *H.M.S. Furious*. It was essential that this state of affairs should be remedied as soon as possible.

Two flotillas of destroyers were commissioned from the reserve for service with the Home Fleet. These were called the Twentieth and Twenty-first Flotillas. Not that there were twenty-one destroyer flotillas in the Royal Navy – there were only nine and a half flotillas, including the three flotillas commissioned in the emergency.

## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

It was fortunate that destroyers were available in reserve for the formation of these extra flotillas. The ships could not, however, be considered as even approximately equivalent to modern destroyers. They were all ships which had been built under the emergency programmes of the Great War. Many of them had seen gruelling war service. For years they had been lying in "maintenance reserve," at what would normally have been their last moorings before being towed away to the ship-breakers. Ships deteriorate rapidly under such conditions. In at least one case a seaman who was chipping rust from the hull of a destroyer in reserve found that his hammer went right through the plating of the ship's side.

Some of the destroyers commissioned from reserve during the early autumn of 1935 had already had their guns and torpedo-tubes removed. None of them had any stores, and such things as cables and rigging had to be surveyed, repaired, or renewed before the ships could join the fleet. An immense amount of work was involved in "bringing forward" the destroyers. That it was all carried out quickly, quietly, and efficiently is a great tribute to the officers and men concerned – for they were woefully short-handed for their tasks.

The sudden commissioning of these flotillas of destroyers from the reserve anticipated events in two ways. The Twentieth Destroyer Flotilla was composed of eight ships instead of the usual nine. More than a year later it was decided by the Admiralty that all future destroyer flotillas should consist of eight ships. The sudden and great need in 1935 for destroyers led directly to the action of the British Government a year later when, by invoking the "Escalator Clause" of the London Naval Treaty, it saved 40,000 tons of British destroyers from the shipbreaking yards. The "Escalator Clause" of the treaty was a clause by which a signatory Power could escape from the limitations of the treaty if its security



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

was menaced by the naval building of any Power which had not signed the treaty.

The destroyer is the answer to the submarine. Since neither France nor Italy had subscribed to the limitations of the treaty, and both had continued to build large numbers of submarines, there was obvious reason for the retention of destroyers by Great Britain – under the “Escalator Clause.” This clause, however, like every clause in every treaty, had its snag. So soon as Great Britain proposed the retention of destroyers, Japan, not having an equivalent tonnage of destroyers destined for scrap, announced that she proposed to retain submarines.

Another immediate requirement of the Mediterranean Fleet, faced with the threat of war, was for minesweepers. There were already in the Mediterranean nine minesweepers of the old twin-screw type which performed such sterling service during the Great War. All these ships were, however, paid off and in reserve at Malta at the end of August 1935. Within the first fortnight in September, however, they had all been commissioned and made ready for service.

This minesweeping force was not considered adequate. At least seven of the Italian submarines were fitted as minelayers, while nearly all Italy's destroyers were designed to lay mines. In addition, all the six cruisers of the *Condottieri* class, the cruiser *Emanuele Filiberto Duca d'Aosta*, and the three ex-German cruisers *Ancona*, *Bari*, and *Taranto*, were all capable of minelaying. The waters of the Mediterranean off the mouths of the Nile and the northern end of the Suez Canal, being both tideless and comparatively shallow, offered ideal conditions for the laying of mines, which, in those waters, would be likely to have levied a heavy toll on shipping.

A further flotilla of eight minesweepers was sent to the Mediterranean from Portland. Most of the ships of this flotilla were the new vessels of the *Halcyon* type.

Even this reinforcement was not considered to provide

## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

a sufficient minesweeping force in the Mediterranean, and other suitable ships were not readily available. The Admiralty therefore purchased twenty fishing trawlers. These little ships were hastily fitted for minesweeping and commissioned – chiefly by officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve. The three naval minesweeping trawlers *Garry*, *Liffey*, and *Dee* were specially commissioned at Portland to teach the Royal Naval Reserve personnel how to sweep mines in trawlers. The trawlers, after a very short period of training, sailed for the Eastern Mediterranean. They represented but a small part of the assistance given to the Royal Navy by the Royal Naval Reserve during the time of crisis.

One of the chief reasons for manning the minesweeping trawlers from the reserve was the shortage of Royal Naval personnel.

This had become desperate under the sudden and enormously increased demands. There was a shortage of officers of certain ranks – a shortage which made the Admiralty regret the thinning of the lists by the succession of “axes” and retiring schemes which had been forced upon it by Governments interested only in economy. There was a far greater shortage of men. On many occasions officers sent to a port to commission a ship found that they were quite unable to carry out their orders as no crew was available.

The personnel of the Royal Navy had, it is true, risen by 4,815 officers and men from its nadir in 1932, but the maximum personnel for 1935 – 94,482 officers and men – made no allowance for the commissioning of extra ships in emergency.

The men to man the destroyers and other craft “brought forward” and commissioned from the reserve were found from all manner of sources. A number of men of the reserves, who were undergoing training with the fleet, were retained. The manning depots were almost denuded of men, while the crews and “care and

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

maintenance" parties of ships remaining in reserve were cut to the minimum. H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, the demilitarised battleship used as a training-ship for boys, had to be paid off. Another battleship, H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*, was reduced to a special small complement to take over the duties of boys' training-ship.

The saving in men through this double-shuffle amounted to about 600. Six hundred men at that time were infinitely desirable – even at the price of immobilising another battleship. The shortage of men was met, in part, by offering attractive terms whereby men whose time was expired, and who would normally have left the naval service on pension, remained on the active list. Some 3,000 men were added to the list in this way.

Battleships were not in demand for the protection of the Mediterranean and Red Sea. There was ample capital-ship force already available in the Mediterranean. The London Naval Treaty of 1930 had left the British Empire with fifteen capital ships. During the greater part of the emergency following upon Italian ambitions in Abyssinia, five of these ships were in dockyard hands, while a sixth was reduced to special complement in order to ease the manning situation. The result was that the British Empire had during that time only nine capital ships ready for sea – less than two-thirds of its total capital-ship strength.

This was at a time when the late Lord Jellicoe, referring to the under-age capital ships of the principal navies, said: "At the end of 1936 the position will be: British Empire, 4; United States of America, 8; Japan, 5."

The reduction of Great Britain's cruiser strength, which had been characterised by Lord Beatty two years before as a "grave and deplorable blunder," was also being felt by the Admiralty – in spite of cruiser reinforcements sent to the Mediterranean from all over the world. Cruisers which had joined the reserve some time

## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

before, and which had not been expected to see further service, were hastily made ready.

In some cases an excess of zeal in making these ships fit only for the reserve presented those who wished to make them ready for active service with well-nigh insuperable problems. In the case of one cruiser, the torpedo-tubes had been removed in order to give greater facilities and space for training. During the emergency, orders were given that the torpedo-tubes were to be fitted once again. Only then was it discovered that all the electrical torpedo-control circuits had been cut out. Reinstallation of the torpedo-tubes would have been of little use unless all the control circuits were rewired – a task which would have occupied several weeks and proved very costly.

One of the greatest problems which accompanied the crisis of 1935 was the serious shortage of essential stores.

Ever since the end of the Great War the Royal Navy had been forced to exist upon stocks of surplus war stores. This applied to practically everything, but in no department was it so serious as in the matter of shells. There was plenty of practice shell and common shell available, but the supplies of armour-piercing projectiles and high-explosive shell were seriously inadequate.

In October 1933 Lord Beatty had said: "During the period of eight years that I was First Sea Lord we lived on large stocks of reserve material accumulated after the war. These stocks cannot last for ever, and to replace them costs money." Lord Beatty left the Admiralty in 1927, and figures from the annual Navy Estimates show that expenditure on stores, instead of going up owing to the exhaustion of war stocks, went down.

In 1926 the expenditure on naval stores was £3,795,300. In 1930 it was £2,114,800, and in 1935 it was £2,716,100.

Expenditure on ammunition for the Royal Navy was already showing an increase when the challenge came

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in the Mediterranean. In 1926 this expenditure had been only £988,000. By 1930 it had sunk to £839,475, but in 1935 it was £1,289,400. When, however, one compares this figure with the £4,159,100 required for projectiles and ammunition under the Navy Estimates for 1937, one begins to visualise the extent of the deficiency in 1935.

The ships in the Eastern Mediterranean in the autumn of 1935 had sufficient ammunition for one full-scale fleet action. If such an action had eventuated, the ships would afterwards have been largely innocuous, since further supplies of ammunition were not available.

The situation was aggravated by the necessity for combating Italy's other great weapon – air attack. Italy had at her disposal a large number of efficient and modern aircraft, notably fast long-range bombers. In the early days of the emergency the British air forces in the Eastern Mediterranean consisted almost entirely of the machines of the Fleet Air Arm. The fighting machines available were not of up-to-date design, and pilots knew that they had neither the speed nor the manoeuvrability necessary for successful action against fast modern bombers.

Some of the ships in the Eastern Mediterranean were already fitted with the multiple pom-pom anti-aircraft gun. This weapon, as mounted in capital ships, consists of a nest of eight barrels firing small high-explosive shells automatically on the pom-pom principle. The rate of fire of these guns is secret, despite the fact that a figure has appeared in a newspaper and a film has been taken of the gun in action. Suffice to say that it is very high – so great that a ship not specially designed for the stowage and supply of ammunition for these guns could not keep them in action for more than a very few minutes. It may be argued that such a gun would only be required for a very short time, because of the speed at which air attacks are delivered. On the other hand, a few feint attacks or a series of attacks might result in the later attacks being

## BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

delivered upon ships which had expended all their pom-pom ammunition.

The ammunition problem for these multiple pom-poms remains a difficult one. There is no denying, however, that the gun is the most effective weapon ever designed to combat air attack. Its shape, coupled with the fact that secrecy regulations entailed its being hidden under a painted canvas cover whenever unauthorised eyes were near, led to its being named the "Chicago piano" by the men of the Royal Navy.

There was no doubt that the defence of the fleet against possible air attack left much to be desired, and steps were immediately taken to strengthen the fleet in this respect. As has happened so often before, the special requirements of the emergency led to the development of a special type of ship.

Two old cruisers, H.M.S. *Coventry* and H.M.S. *Curlew*, both of which had been laid down in 1916, were rapidly altered. Their original armament of five 6-inch guns and two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns was removed. In place of this armament an exclusively anti-aircraft armament was mounted, and the latest form of anti-aircraft fire control incorporated. The new armament consisted of ten 4-inch anti-aircraft guns, two "Chicago pianos," and a number of multiple machine guns capable of firing explosive bullets half an inch in diameter. Large provision was made for ammunition stowage. The alteration of these ships led to a considerable reduction in their speed, but this was accepted, as they still possessed sufficient speed to accompany the fleet.

The general shortage of material was well illustrated during the alteration of these two ships. An anti-aircraft gun disappeared from the Imperial War Museum. Nobody seemed able to give any satisfactory explanation of its disappearance at the time, but it was afterwards admitted that the gun had been mounted in one of the altered cruisers. Other anti-aircraft guns for these

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

two ships were "borrowed" from H.M.S. *Iron Duke*.

The greatest secrecy shrouded the alteration of these ships – a secrecy which was preserved in England long after full details of the alterations had appeared in an American newspaper.

It is interesting to note that the altered H.M.S. *Coventry* and H.M.S. *Curlew* were found to be such valuable additions to the fleet that five more old cruisers, which were saved from the scrap-heap by the British Government's decision in the autumn of 1936 to invoke the "Escalator Clause" of the London Naval Treaty of 1930, are to be similarly converted.

During the first few weeks of the emergency which had led to the concentration of the greater part of the Royal Navy in the waters of the Mediterranean and Red Sea, the serious deficiencies in personnel, material, and supplies caused much anxiety to the British Government and to those officers in the fleet who were aware of the true state of affairs. "Our position at present is lamentable," wrote Lord Jellicoe in October 1935.

There is little doubt that it was to the gravity of the Mediterranean situation, and the unpreparedness of the British Empire, that Mr. Baldwin alluded when he made his famous reference to his lips being sealed.

It was in the debate upon the Hoare-Laval peace plan – that last desperate effort to buy off Italy, which had been strangled at birth by British public opinion – that Mr. Baldwin said:

"I have seldom spoken with greater regret, for my lips are not yet unsealed. Were these troubles over I would make a case, and I guarantee that not a man would go into the lobby against us."

## CHAPTER XIII

### BULWARKS OF PEACE

Mediterranean defence dispositions – work of the Fleet Air Arm –  
fortifying mandated territory – footing the bill

IN AN ASTONISHINGLY SHORT TIME after the beginning of the emergency on August 30th, 1935, there was in the Mediterranean and Red Sea a tremendous concentration of naval force, while more reinforcements were continually arriving from the more distant squadrons such as Australia, New Zealand, China, and the America and West Indies Station.

It is impossible to give all the details of the dispositions which Admiral Sir William Fisher took for the protection of vital British interests, for constant changes were taking place. Ships were always moving from one place to another, partly owing to storing and fuelling requirements, and partly in order to give a change to the ships' companies. It is, however, possible to outline the principal commitments of the Navy and show in broad terms how they were covered.

At the western end of the Mediterranean the Straits of Gibraltar were guarded by the two battle cruisers, a squadron of 6-inch gun cruisers, and a destroyer flotilla. The harbour of Gibraltar was protected against a sudden raid by the placing of a boom defence across the entrance. From the military point of view, the defence of the Rock was being strengthened by the mounting of additional heavy guns, and the garrison of troops was reinforced. From the latter part of January 1936 until March of that year the naval forces in the vicinity of Gibraltar were further strengthened owing to the presence in those



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

waters of the remainder of the Home Fleet, which was then carrying out its spring cruise. The main units of this fleet, which was under the command of Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse, were the two 16-inch gun battle-ships H.M.S. *Nelson* and H.M.S. *Rodney*, and the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Furious*.

Malta, in normal times the main base of the Mediterranean Fleet, was almost deserted, so far as the Navy was concerned. That is not to say that it was abandoned. Far from it. The defences of the island, both against air attack and against raids from the sea, were rapidly strengthened. There was nearly always a cruiser, and sometimes a battleship, at Malta, either paying a short visit to the dockyard or embarking stores. In order to guard against raids from the sea, boom defences had been placed across the harbour entrance, while a division of submarines from the China Station patrolled the approaches. It may seem curious that the Home Fleet submarines went to Aden, while those from the China Station went to Malta. The reason was that those from China were the most effective and modern, and were therefore selected to combat the greater threat.

It was appreciated, however, that Malta offered a fine target for air attack, due to its proximity to the Sicilian coast and to the comparative inadequacy of its anti-aircraft defences when the emergency arose. For this reason the wives and families of many officers in the Fighting Services were evacuated from the island. This was done by giving them passages in transports which had brought troops out to the Mediterranean and would otherwise have been returning to England empty. The transport *Neuralia* left Malta for England on September 28th with a large number of women and children on board.

The extent to which the base defences in the Mediterranean were strengthened during the early months of the crisis is shown by the appearance in the Navy List of a new establishment. This was called "H.M.S. *Presi-*

## BULWARKS OF PEACE

*dent IV* (Base Defences, Mediterranean)," and it has since ceased to figure in the Navy List. It comprised no less than ninety-three officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. It was under the command of Rear-Admiral R. Leatham, and the Royal Marines were commanded by Brigadier W. L. H. Tripp. The establishment, which was concerned with the defences of Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt and the Suez Canal, and Haifa, came into being early in September 1935, the first officers being appointed on September 3rd – four days after the first steps to guard against Italian attack had been taken by the British Admiralty.

While the greater part of the work of the personnel of H.M.S. *President IV* was concerned with Egypt and Haifa, where there were virtually no existing defences, particularly against aircraft, great things were done at Malta. It is extremely probable that Italy would have found air attack on Malta exceedingly costly, if Mussolini had decided upon such a course when, six weeks after the beginning of the emergency, he flirted again with his plan for action against Great Britain.

The main pre-occupation of Admiral Sir William Fisher lay further east, in the defence of the Suez Canal, which has aptly been termed the aorta of the Empire.

A threat to Egypt was a threat to the Suez Canal, and there were three possibilities to be guarded against – attack by land from Lybia in the west, attack by sea or by air from Italy itself to the north-west; attack by sea or air from Rhodes or the Dodecanese to the north.

The threats from the west and north-west could best be met by a concentration of force to the west of the Suez Canal. Providentially, the demands of strategy were met by the only harbour in the vicinity capable of accommodating a large fleet – Alexandria. Alexandria was also in a position to threaten the flank of any attack upon the Suez Canal from the north. Haifa, too, was not only a commitment. It provided a base from which

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

a naval force would be in a position to threaten the other flank of any attack on the Suez Canal from the north or north-west. As has so often happened in the past, the British Empire was well served by geography.

Alexandria, however, was, at the beginning of September 1935, practically devoid of defences. There was no air defence at all, while defence against attack from the sea was confined almost entirely to a few old and crumbling forts, which had never been repaired after the shattering blows of the British bombardment in 1882.

Great Britain, with the major portion of her Navy concentrated at Alexandria, immediately set about providing that port with the defences which circumstances demanded. These were chiefly anti-aircraft defences, for no low-angle shore batteries which could be hastily erected could hope to add greatly to the gun-power of the fleet moored behind the long, low breakwater.

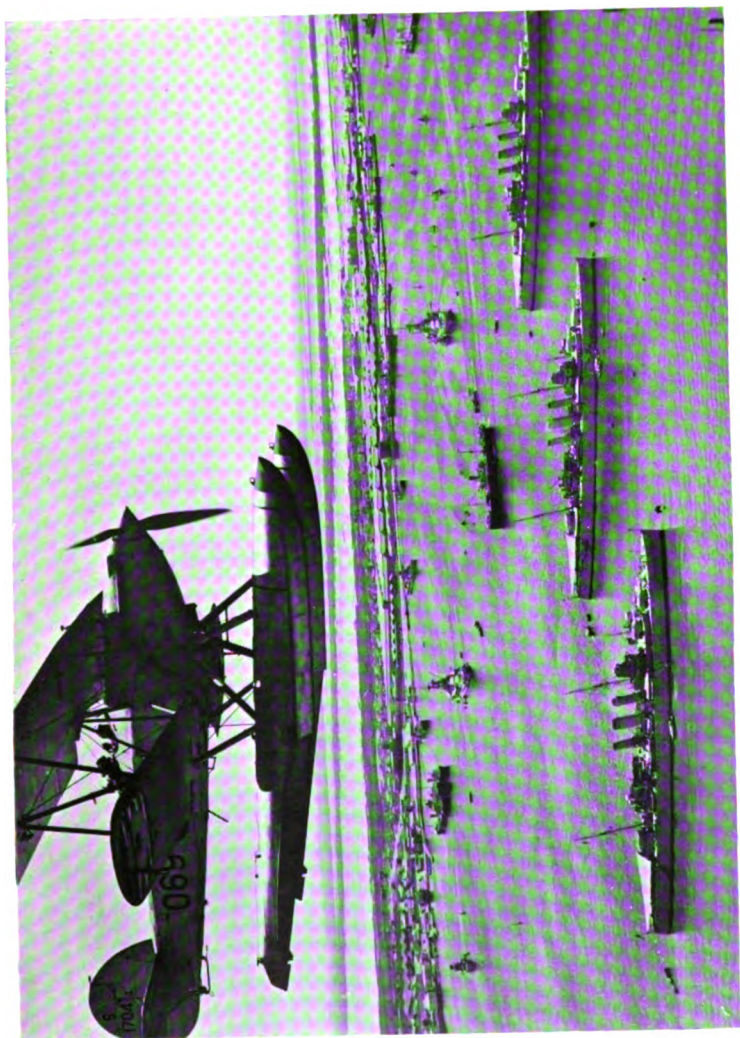
The old, half-ruined forts, with their cracked gun emplacements, were hastily put into some sort of repair, and became strongholds of the officers and men of H.M.S. *President IV*. The ugly snouts of high-angle guns showed over the ancient walls, while one could also see the fat barrels of searchlights and the horizontal tubes of rangefinders.

The forts were but part of the new defences. All along the sand-spit which stretched between Lake Maryut and the Mediterranean there sprang up camps, each one with its searchlights, its anti-aircraft guns, and its rangefinders.

Mr. Douglas Duff, who flew over Alexandria in May 1936, records in his book, *Palestine Picture*, how:

“Lazy curls of smoke showed above the tents of the Royal Marines manning the batteries whose hungry mouths gaped towards the sky, for ever on the alert for enemy aircraft, the dreaded argosies of the new Rome.

“What drastically censored pap, I reflected, were we fed upon in England! How carefully doctored was



Scaplane flying over Alexandria harbour during the 1935 crisis –  
“county” class cruisers in the foreground



## BULWARKS OF PEACE

the news that we were allowed to receive. These gun emplacements were not built for fun; the searchlight platforms and the sandbagged redoubts were not meant for amusement. A threat of deadly peril had been levelled against this town. . . ."

Beneath the watchful muzzles of these anti-aircraft batteries lay the main part of the naval might of Britain. Battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines, minesweepers, transports and store-ships, oilers – "a gathering, probably, which formed the mightiest armada that this ancient port of the Ptolemies had ever seen."

The fleet did not rest. Always there was the need to strengthen the position still further. This was facilitated by the arrival of supplies from home. Always there was the need for watchfulness, for constant reconnaissance, in order to ensure that the fleet should not be caught unawares in the crowded harbour. Day and night anti-submarine patrols scoured the waters outside the harbour to make sure that, if the need came for the fleet to leave Alexandria, it would not run into an ambush of submerged submarines. More than once, depth-charges were dropped by the anti-submarine patrols to convince any lurking submarines that the locality was not a healthy one for any who sought to deal a blow at the Navy of England.

In carrying out the frequent reconnaissances, and in providing defence against the possible attacks of enemy aircraft, the machines of the Fleet Air Arm played a conspicuous part. Aircraft cannot operate from an aircraft carrier when it is in harbour. For this reason the Fleet Air Arm aircraft from the aircraft carriers H.M.S. *Glorious* and H.M.S. *Courageous* were landed whenever the ships were in harbour and embarked whenever the ships went to sea. The Fleet Air Arm aircraft, in fact, became, for a time, the Egyptian air defence force, for

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the limited resources of the Royal Air Force at Heliopolis were required for patrolling the western desert towards the Libyan frontier, and guarding against land or air attack from that direction.

The Royal Air Force reinforcements to the Eastern Mediterranean were slow in arriving. Air rearmament was at that time in its infancy, and, although the Air Ministry was prepared to send squadrons of aircraft at short notice to any threatened quarter, it lacked the means of doing so. With an aircraft carrier machines can land on the ship after she has left harbour, and be transported immediately, and in a condition of complete readiness, to the port where they are wanted. It is a different matter when machines have to be taken to pieces and crated, ships chartered and loaded, and the machines unloaded, uncrated, and put together again at the other end of the voyage. Particularly is this the case when the other Defence Departments are in competition in the market for chartering ships to take supplies to the threatened area.

Thus for the first weeks of the emergency the whole of the air duties, not only at and near Alexandria, but also at Haifa, devolved upon the Fleet Air Arm. Flying-boats were also urgently required in the Eastern Mediterranean, both for long-distance reconnaissance work and for anti-submarine patrols, but these also were slow to arrive. It is significant that, when the Royal Air Force reinforcements arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Royal Air Force headquarters were afloat in the transport S.S. *Menela*.

Meanwhile the personnel of the Fleet Air Arm had performed miracles. The small landing-ground at Amria was enlarged into a good-sized aerodrome. From it there operated, whenever the aircraft carriers were in harbour, the spotter-reconnaissance machines, the fighting aircraft, and the torpedo bombers. These machines formed the air striking-force against any raid from the sea, and provided the only fighting aircraft available to harass

## BULWARKS OF PEACE

enemy bombers in the event of air raids. The machines operating from this aerodrome were Ospreys, Nimrods, and Demons.

Further to the eastward, one squadron of Fairey IIIF machines was based upon the aerodrome at Abukir. To this squadron was entrusted the task of carrying out the anti-submarine air patrols off Alexandria.

Still further to the eastward, at Port Said, a squadron of Ospreys carried out anti-submarine air patrols off the entrance to the Suez Canal. These machines were fitted with floats and were based in Port Said harbour.

At Haifa, too, the only aircraft available for anti-submarine air patrols during the first weeks of the emergency were machines of the Fleet Air Arm. These patrols were carried out by three Osprey seaplanes from cruisers. They worked from the harbour, where they were based at a slipway. At Aden, of course, all aircraft were provided by the Royal Air Force garrison.

The main approach to Egypt and the valley of the Nile from Libya lies along the coast road. Although a large portion of the desert between the valley of the Nile and the Libyan frontier was converted by the Army and the Royal Air Force into an armed camp guarded by barbed-wire entanglements, the Navy played its part in watching the coast road. Guard-ships were stationed at Sollum, close to the frontier, and off Matruh, while the coast was frequently patrolled.

Although the major part of the fleet was based upon Alexandria, there were considerable squadrons elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea. At Port Said there was usually one battleship, two or three cruisers, and some destroyers, while there were destroyers at various points along the canal. At Haifa there were cruisers, submarines, and destroyers.

After the Suez Canal, Haifa represented the greatest commitment of the British fleet in the Mediterranean. This was because the pipe line which brings oil – that



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

sinew of modern war and industry – 1,000 odd miles across the desert from Kirkuk has one of its two Mediterranean terminals at Haifa. The pipe line had only been opened in January 1935.

When the emergency arose in the Eastern Mediterranean, Haifa was quite undefended. There was no harbour capable of accommodating large numbers of warships, or of being closed by a defensive boom. For this reason its defence presented a problem widely different from that at Alexandria. It could not be assumed that the threat to Haifa was less serious than that to Alexandria. So long as a British naval force was at Haifa it would be in a position to take in the flank or rear any expedition attacking Egypt and the Suez Canal. Apart from this, the destruction or capture of the terminal of a pipe line capable of delivering three million gallons of oil a day was an objective too valuable to be ruled out of account.

So far as shore defences were concerned, both low-angle and high-angle guns were mounted in the vicinity of the harbour and on the slopes of Mount Carmel. Some of these low-angle guns were weapons dismantled from the shoreward defences of Gibraltar and hurriedly shipped to Haifa, since other guns were not available.

Haifa is in Palestine, and Palestine is held by Great Britain as a Class A Mandate under the League of Nations. The terms of a mandate expressly forbid the erection of any fortifications on the mandated territory. Thus there came about the Gilbertian situation of the League of Nations invoking sanctions against one of its members for a violation of the Covenant, while support of the League involved infringement of its laws by another of the States Members.

The fact that Great Britain had mounted guns for the defence of Haifa was well known to Japan, and one can hardly blame the Japanese for their slightly bewildered annoyance at being pilloried in the British Press for

## BULWARKS OF PEACE

alleged fortification of some of their mandated islands in the Pacific.

From the point of view of maritime defence Haifa relied upon three factors: anti-submarine patrols both by air and by destroyers; the presence of large and fast submarines; defensive mine-fields. The defensive mine-fields were never actually laid, but the mines were in readiness for instant laying should circumstances have made this desirable. For this purpose, the minelaying cruiser H.M.S. *Adventure*, which carries 340 mines, had been sent from the China Station. She arrived in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the third week in September. The minelaying capabilities of the force at Haifa also included the large minelaying submarine H.M.S. *Porpoise*.

The Haifa force, which included some ships which visited Cyprus from time to time, was ideally constituted, both for the defence of the pipe line terminal, and to serve as a fast striking-force on the flank or rear of any attack on the Suez Canal. It consisted, during the greater part of the emergency period, of at least one heavy and one light cruiser apart from the minelaying cruiser H.M.S. *Adventure*; one or two flotillas of destroyers, and some of the fastest submarines available. Both strategically and, in some degree, in its composition, the Haifa force of 1935-6 was the parallel of the Harwich force of 1914-18.

The other important strategic factor in the crisis - Aden and the command of the Straits of Bab el Mandeb - was comparatively lightly guarded. For most of the time it was left to the cruiser *Colombo*, a flotilla of old submarines from the Home Fleet, and half a flotilla of destroyers. This force was considered adequate for the task, observing that the Italian naval forces in the Red Sea were not very strong and that they could not be reinforced without Admiral Sir William Fisher knowing of any such move in plenty of time to counter it.

So comprehensive and far-reaching were the measures

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

taken to withstand the threat of Italian action against British interests in the Mediterranean and Red Sea that it was hardly surprising that the bill was a heavy one. In February 1936, Supplementary Estimates for all three of the Defence Services were issued. These amounted to £7,811,100, and practically the whole of that sum was required to meet the cost of what were termed "special measures" taken in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. The Navy's share – naturally enough, in view of the greater measures taken by that Service – was by far the largest in these Supplementary Estimates. It amounted to £4,850,000.

The Royal Navy sought authority for an increase of 3,500 men in the naval personnel. This increase was not permanent. It was an emergency stop-gap measure designed to produce a temporary easing of the shortage of trained men. The greater part of the increase in personnel was composed of men who, although already time-expired, had volunteered for further service in response to appeals from the Admiralty.

It was natural that a large sum should be required for freight and lighterage, and that the bill for fuel and lubricating oil should have gone up by nearly a quarter of a million pounds. The item "purchase of ships, vessels, etc.," which accounted for more than £300,000, of course covered the purchase of the twenty trawlers required for minesweeping duties, and for six fast motor torpedo-boats, which were ordered late in 1935.

The extent of the shortage of ammunition was demonstrated in this Supplementary Estimate. The additional sum required for ammunition for the Fleet under the heading of "special measures" was nearly half a million pounds, while the total original estimate for the whole year under this heading had been little more than two and a half millions. The cost of transport of naval armaments amounted to nearly £200,000.

Nor was this Supplementary Estimate the total cost of

## BULWARKS OF PEACE

the British naval effort in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. On April 28th, 1936, Lord Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, presented to Parliament another Supplementary Estimate for the Navy. This provided for a further £2,117,000 for the "continuation of special measures."

The bill was certainly a heavy one, particularly since the "special measures" completely failed to save the face of the League of Nations. Mussolini's troops crossed the Abyssinian frontier at 5 a.m. on October 3rd, 1935, and Marshal Badoglio drove into Addis Ababa at four o'clock on the afternoon of May 5th, 1936.

On the other hand, the effort and treasure expended saved the British Empire from a threat which must have been extremely grave, in spite of the British Government's professed belief in collective security. It did more. It forced Government and people to realise the dangers of unilateral disarmament and unwise economy, and it laid the foundation of the British rearmament programme. However much one may deplore the all-round rapid increase in armaments in the world to-day, there is no denying that it has already given greater force to the voice of the British Empire in the councils of the world.

In short, the Mediterranean crisis started the reversal of the situation described by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, on September 19th, 1935, when he said:

"Our defensive forces have fallen to a dangerously low level, and the knowledge of this on the Continent of Europe has shaken the confidence of our friends in our ability to carry out our obligations."

It was only natural that confidence should be shaken, since "our friends" knew that negotiations had been opened by Great Britain, first with France and later with other States Members of the League of Nations, with a view to securing their support for the British Navy in the event of attack by Italy.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SPIRIT AND WELFARE

Censorship in England – hardship imposed on naval personnel – unfounded rumours of discontent – spirit of the fleet – Claridge's Fleet Club at Alexandria

ONE OF THE MOST remarkable features of the way in which the extensive British precautionary measures were taken was the general absence of fuss which attended them. It is probably true to say that during the last day of August and the first three or four days of September 1935 few officers and men in the fleet, apart from those in command of units, had any idea of the gravity of the situation.

Storing, fuelling, and preparations for sea were certainly hastened. But this was done as unobtrusively as possible, and few people regarded the slight extra haste as a portent of great events. Such matters have often had to be hastened in order that ships may be ready to take part in some pre-arranged exercises, and there was no reason to suppose that on this occasion it should be heralding anything more unusual.

In the Mediterranean the most wonderful part of the early days of the crisis was the sudden unheralded arrival of reinforcements from other fleets and squadrons. "On a Sunday morning in early September at Haifa we woke up to see a flotilla of Home Fleet destroyers arriving." They slid into the bay in line ahead, for all the world as if they were visiting the Palestine coast in accordance with a cruise programme known to all the world.

At Alexandria it was the same, although the rapid

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

erection of anti-aircraft batteries ashore and the boom defence across the harbour entrance soon gave a more warlike air to the proceedings. Within a very short time there had arrived at Alexandria ships from the Home Fleet, the China Squadron, the America and West Indies Station, the Royal Australian Navy, and the New Zealand Division. All these ships from distant stations steamed into Alexandria harbour and fitted into their appointed places in the fleet concentration like the pieces of an intricate jigsaw puzzle. There was a difference. There was no fumbling about, no trial and error attempts to force a misfit into place. The work of Admiral Sir William Fisher and his staff proved perfect.

It cannot be said that the absence of fuss and alarm was universal. During the first weeks of the emergency Gibraltar was conscientiously "blackened out" every night. This would certainly have increased the difficulties of patrolling submarines, small craft which wished to raid the harbour, or destroyers or cruisers which desired to carry out a bombardment. The presence of submarines was, however, virtually disproved after the first few days of September, in which a large number of British warships passed safely through the straits into the Mediterranean; an efficient boom defended the harbour entrances; and the bold outlines of the Rock and Apes Hill against the sky, coupled with navigation marks and accurate charts, would have enabled a bombardment to be carried out from the sea irrespective of other lights.

The "black-outs" at Gibraltar were interpreted by the civil population as air-raid precautions. Yet Gibraltar is 800 miles from Sardinia, and Mussolini was likely to have more important and vulnerable objectives for his long-range bombers. It was known, moreover, that Italy possessed no aircraft carriers, and that her only seaplane carrier, the *Giuseppe Miraglia*, was busily engaged in transporting aircraft to Eritrea.

In England, absence of fuss was ensured by two things.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The British public was too interested in Italy and the League of Nations to pay much attention to how the British Defence Services were moving in response to a threat of which it knew nothing.

This state of mind was actively encouraged. Whitehall imposed upon the British Press a form of censorship. That this was advisable in the state of public opinion in England there can be no doubt. Nevertheless, it brought to Fleet Street a confusion which exasperated editors. This was not because they revolted against censorship in the national interest. Newspaper editors and their staffs are, almost without exception, intensely patriotic men. But Fleet Street keeps its fingers upon the pulse of the world. In its offices the foreign newspapers are examined; and it is exasperating for a British newspaper to be under an obligation to Whitehall not to print news which is appearing in the foreign Press. There was, too, some initial confusion as to what news should be printed and what news should be suppressed.

Finally, however, censorship was boiled down to the suppression of information of a ship having left any port in the "emergency area." News of the arrival of ships was not suppressed.

The daily "Movements of H.M. Ships" issued by the Admiralty became very incomplete during the crisis, although they continued to be issued in order to demonstrate that there was no obvious secrecy. This led to a few cases of minor hardship and disappointment among friends and relatives of men in the Royal Navy. As Naval Correspondent of the *Morning Post* during this period the writer received a most incensed letter from two ladies – aunts of a member of the crew of one of His Majesty's destroyers. The two ladies, having seen in the newspapers of some days before that their nephew's ship had arrived at Portland, went to considerable trouble and expense in order to pay him a visit; but when they arrived

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

at Portland there was no sign of the destroyer in question. The ladies were, not unnaturally, very cross. Why had the departure of the ship from Portland not been published, and where had she gone? The framing of a reply which neither revealed the Admiralty's censorship nor admitted inefficiency in the *Morning Post* office was a matter of some difficulty.

Hardship certainly was imposed by the emergency. Quick action was important. Many men were drafted away suddenly, without receiving the usual "drafting leave," which in normal times gives them opportunity to say farewell to their families and make arrangements for their dependants during their absence abroad. In some cases, notably that of the battleship H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, ships' companies which had arrived in England in order to pay off, and be granted foreign service leave after two years or more abroad, had to take their ships to the Mediterranean for a further period of foreign service. In many other cases ships which were due to return to England in order to pay off after a commission abroad were retained in the Mediterranean. Notable among such ships were the vessels of what was at that time the First Destroyer Flotilla of the Mediterranean Fleet. These nine ships had been part of the China Squadron until their relief earlier in 1935 by the destroyers of the *Defender* class. They had been recommissioned at Hong Kong in April 1934, and they were on their way home, but were kept with the Mediterranean Fleet in order to reinforce the destroyer strength of that fleet.

Officers and men of ships retained in the Mediterranean or Red Sea saw their home-coming, and the foreign service leave to which they had been long looking forward, postponed for an indefinite period. Wives and families faced bitter disappointment at home.

In one case a destroyer proceeding from Portland to Portsmouth was suddenly ordered by wireless to go to



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the Mediterranean, first stop Malta. In this case the hardship fell upon the captain's wife, for the destroyer had on board all her luggage.

Ships of the Home Fleet were sent to reinforce the Mediterranean and the Red Sea commands. These ships would normally have been at their home ports for more than a month over Christmas and the New Year, and their personnel would have been granted the usual Christmas leave.

Throughout the nine months of the emergency the naval authorities did their utmost to mitigate such hardships, but the universal shortage of trained men made the working of any comprehensive system of reliefs impossible. The safety of the Empire and the exigencies of the naval service overshadowed all personal considerations.

The Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir William Fisher, postponed his return to England. Sir William Fisher had been in command in the Mediterranean since the end of September 1932. He was due for relief shortly after the Mediterranean emergency arose in 1935, and his relief – Admiral Sir Dudley Pound – had been appointed. Under the circumstances, however, it was deemed unwise to effect a change of Commander-in-Chief. Sir William Fisher remained in command, and Sir Dudley Pound, on his arrival in the Mediterranean early in October 1935, served as Chief-of-Staff to Sir William Fisher, thereby gaining invaluable experience of the troublesome command which he was soon to take over.

Admiral Sir William Fisher remained in the Mediterranean and Red Sea until March 20th, 1936, by which time the emergency had virtually passed. There is little doubt that the strain of responsibility at that time, coming as it did at the end of three years as Commander-in-Chief in the watery cockpit of Europe, contributed to his tragic death little more than a year later, when serving as Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth.

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

The Admiralty made arrangements later for the leave lost during the crisis to be made up to the officers and men of the fleet. Its task, however, was made exceedingly difficult by the two other emergencies in the Mediterranean which followed closely upon the heels of that of 1935-6 - that in Palestine, and the Spanish Civil War.

In this connection a certain Admiralty Fleet Order issued in 1936 caused some mystification and amusement in the fleet. It dealt with the granting of extra leave to officers and men who had been employed at Aden during the crisis. There were already orders and regulations in existence with regard to special "tropical leave," and the Admiralty Fleet Order was so plentifully sprinkled with references to these that it was quite unintelligible in itself. People who took the trouble to "decode" this Admiralty Fleet Order with the help of the references to King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions and former Admiralty Fleet Orders found that the great majority of those who served at Aden during the emergency were *not* entitled to extra tropical leave, as their service at Aden had not been during the summer months. On the other hand, a few men - very few by comparison with the numbers at Aden during the crisis - might be entitled to one day's extra leave.

Postponement of home leave was not the only hardship inflicted. There was the constant strain of being always on the alert. There were the incessant patrols. There was, in many cases, the boredom of being tied to one particular harbour under conditions which curtailed shore leave to the minimum. In the Red Sea there was the discomfort of living in old submarines under tropical conditions.

Yet throughout the nine months of the emergency there was no hint of discontent throughout the great fleet. On the Continent of Europe there were, during these months, frequent rumours of disaffection among the men of the fleet in the Mediterranean. It was said

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

on more than one occasion that serious discontent had arisen on account of loss of leave, and because the men of the fleet did not see the force of submitting to hardship in order to support the League of Nations, when no other country had moved a ship or a man on its behalf. These rumours reached England, and some were difficult to combat.

Another most persistent rumour of discontent concerned Gibraltar, where lay ships of the Home Fleet, the crews of which had to forgo their winter visit to their home ports and their Christmas leave. When the rest of the Home Fleet went to Gibraltar in January 1936, the opportunity was taken to send the cruisers and battle cruisers, which had been on guard duty at Gibraltar for more than four months, on short cruises in the vicinity in order to give the personnel a change and greater opportunity for recreation. These short cruises were immediately interpreted in some quarters as proof of disaffection among the crews of the Gibraltar force. It was said that the cruises had been arranged in order to separate the ships and prevent the spread and growth of disaffection.

Not one of these rumours, which sought to minimise the power of the British Fleet during the crisis, was true. This period should, in fact, be regarded as one of the proudest chapters in the history of the British Navy. To tens of thousands of men personal hardships and discomforts counted for nothing beside the general *esprit de corps*.

Some of the tributes paid to the spirit of the men by their officers are memorable: "The thing that was most marked throughout the whole time we spent in the Eastern Mediterranean was the spirit and cheerfulness of the ships' companies. They were magnificent." The words are those of an officer who served in the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the emergency.

Everything possible was done for the comfort and welfare of the men. Regattas, football leagues, and all

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

manner of competitions were organised, and, although the exigencies of the Service frequently prevented such competitions from ever being finished, the competitive spirit remained as high as ever. A great deal of boat-work was done, since shore leave had necessarily to be severely restricted. Numerous regattas were held in Alexandria harbour, the boats pulling over a course laid out between the crowded ships, and behind the boom which protected the harbour entrance.

On one such occasion there occurred an "international incident" which caused much swearing and subsequent amusement. A stokers' cutter race – a cutter is a heavy boat pulled by twelve oars – was in progress when a Greek steamer dropped anchor and swung right across the course. The four boats which were taking part in the race tried to avoid her without giving up the race. In their efforts they fouled one another. In a solid mass, with their oars interlocked, they charged the Greek merchant ship and hit her fair and square amidships. Even a Greek, be his tongue ancient or modern, could hardly have failed to catch the drift of some of the robust language which came from the forty-eight stokers and the four coxswains in the boats.

One of the greatest factors in the achievement and maintenance of a contented naval personnel at Alexandria was Claridge's Fleet Club. This must rank as one of the greatest social enterprises of the century.

Very soon after the fleet arrived at Alexandria it was realised that some sort of naval club was necessary, not only to provide a decent place where the men of the fleet could gather and obtain food and drink, but to prevent the naval personnel from being despoiled by the Egyptians. As soon as it became clear that Alexandria was to be a big naval base for some time to come, every opportunist in Egypt seemed to gravitate to the port. The rate of exchange for changing the English money of the sailors became the concern of an unofficial and swindling

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

“ring.” Counterfeit money appeared in large quantities. Prices rose to prohibitive heights. Curios, always the delight of the sailor, became costly as diamonds and more than usually spurious.

The club owed its inception to a committee of five: Captain W. E. C. Tait, Captain of H.M.S. *Shropshire*; the Reverend C. Paton, Chaplain to the destroyer flotillas; Lieutenant-Commander A. R. Freeman, the Fleet Physical Training Officer; Mr. C. E. Heathcote-Smith, the British Consul-General at Alexandria; and the Reverend P. B. Clayton, the founder padre of Toc H, who was then staying in the fleet as the guest of Admiral Sir William Fisher.

This committee received the sanction of Sir William Fisher and the approval of the Admiralty. The Admiralty granted £150 for the starting of the club. A hundred pounds of this was used but was subsequently repaid. On October 30th a contract was signed with Princess Wiazemsky, the proprietress, for the lease of the whole of the ground floor and half the first floor of Claridge's Hotel, which had been closed for two years. The rent was £82 a month. This rent was guaranteed by the Admiralty, but the guarantee was never called upon.

Claridge's Fleet Club was first opened on November 1st, 1935. On that day 300 men found their way to the club. Next day 1,000 men used the club. On November 3rd – a Sunday – over 2,000 men visited the club. Under the management and organisation of the Reverend C. Paton, Claridge's Fleet Club was an instantaneous success. On November 9th arrangements were made for taking over the rest of the first floor of the hotel and the whole of the basement. On November 13th the club was officially inaugurated by the Commander-in-Chief.

The club went from strength to strength. Before long it possessed all sorts of amenities. There was a barber's shop, a billiard table, a card-room, ping-pong tables, reading-rooms, and writing-rooms. In the latter the

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

consumption of notepaper led to a complaint against a sailor who was given to starting several sheets with "My darling Aggie," and whose efforts at composition then never got further than attempts to draw pictures of his adored. In the library a new and ingenious method of ensuring the return of books was evolved. The library worked in conjunction with a cloakroom, a man who borrowed a book having to deposit his cap in exchange, to be redeemed by the book before he left the club. Bands played in the club every Wednesday and Saturday, and many concerts and dances were held. Language classes were started, at which eighty-four men learned French and fourteen learned German. Before long a fleet of buses had been organised, running between the club and the harbour landing-places. On an average about 4,000 men used the club each Saturday and over 5,000 on Sundays.

The facilities of Claridge's Fleet Club even went so far as the installation of a money-changing counter where a fair exchange was given, and the operation of a curio stall. Money-changing on Saturdays and Sundays exceeded £1,000 a day. The average takings of the curio stall were between £200 and £300 a week, while £100 worth of curios were sold daily for a week or so before Christmas. Such figures would seem to show that the Royal Navy is overpaid, were it not for the very large numbers of men who spent no money elsewhere.

In the bars beer was sold at the prices which the men were accustomed to paying at Malta – about one-third of the price ruling elsewhere in Alexandria. As much as £150 worth of beer was consumed daily, but there was no drunkenness or disorder. During the Christmas and New Year week more than 20,000 bottles of beer were sold – seemingly fantastic figures which, if the size of the fleet at Alexandria were not taken into account, would lead to belief that there must be a naval equivalent to Napoleon's famous phrase – "an army marches on its stomach."

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

One of the most ambitious undertakings connected with the Fleet Club was the starting of a weekly magazine. This was called *Claridge's Fleet Club Chronicle*, and was edited by the Reverend Charles Paton. The first number appeared on November 5th, and it only missed publication in one week from that time to the closing of the club. That was in the week of the death of King George V. In place of the usual issue for that week a special memorial number was produced. This contained tributes to the Sailor King from an ordinary seaman, a midshipman, a chief petty officer, a marine, and a leading seaman. It must have been one of the most notable and touching memorial numbers ever issued by any publication.

With its manifold activities catering for so large a number of men, Claridge's Fleet Club proved a financial success. Its average weekly turnover was more than £4,000, and by March 1936 there had been created a reserve fund, to pay for dilapidations and so on, which amounted to £2,000. When the Mediterranean emergency passed and the fleet left Alexandria, there was no longer any reason for Claridge's Fleet Club. It was closed down in the middle of July 1936. Not only was it able to discharge all its commitments, but a considerable sum was handed over to naval charities.

At Haifa there was even less in the way of amenities than at Alexandria. Recreation grounds were practically non-existent. The sailor's genius for improvisation, however, rose above such difficulties. Deck hockey – a game played with a "puck" instead of a ball – was played on the oil dock and became very popular, while cross-country runs, regattas, and athletic sports were organised. Here, also, a club made its appearance in response to the demand created by the presence of the naval squadrons. This was the Newton House Club, and it played a most valuable part in the naval life at Haifa.

Cheery *camaraderie*, combined with the discipline necessary to keep a large force at the peak of efficiency,

## SPIRIT AND WELFARE

was the keynote of the British naval forces in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. Nor was cheerfulness the monopoly of the Royal Navy. It marked also the Army and the Royal Air Force, and there was both technical co-operation and friendliness between the three Services.

An instance of the spirit ruling all three Services will suffice. Some officers of the Camel Corps came riding into Aden. Sailors from submarines tried their hands at navigating the "ships of the desert," and the Camel Corps officers were treated to a very cheery dinner by the Navy. Afterwards the Camel Corps officers, who had no idea what their next job was likely to be, sent a cablegram to Mussolini. It read simply: "The Camels are coming." History, more's the pity, does not relate whether the cable ever reached its exalted addressee, or, if it did, what reception it was given by *Il Duce*. It seems that a sense of humour is not a characteristic of dictators. "Dictators never laugh!" says Mr. John Gunther, discussing Mussolini in his famous book, *Inside Europe*.



## CHAPTER XV

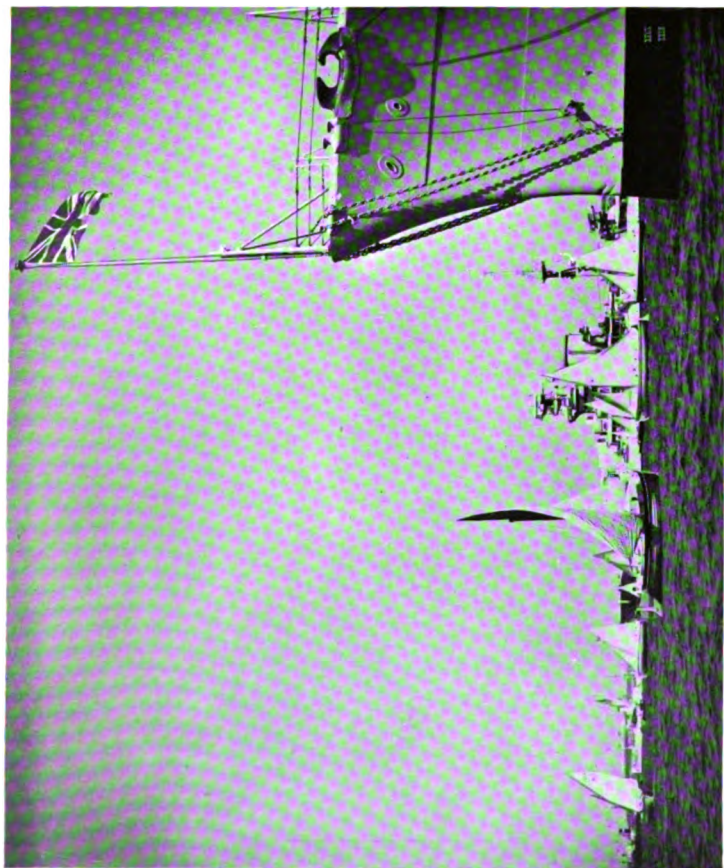
### SECOND CHALLENGE

The October threat – Italian ship on fire in Alexandria harbour – effects of Britain's naval concentration – demonstration of strength – end of sanctions against Italy

ONCE AGAIN DURING THE AUTUMN OF 1935 did the threat of Italian action against Great Britain assume serious proportions. This was in the middle of October.

The Italian invasion of Abyssinia began on October 3rd. Between the formal condemnation of this action by the League of Nations on October 11th and October 19th, no less than five proposals for sanctions had been approved by the Committee of Eighteen. The British Government had not put forward the proposals for all these sanctions. Nevertheless, it was obvious that, had it not been for the "lead" given to the League by the British Government, the imposition of sanctions would have long remained a source of academic argument at Geneva rather than an actuality.

From the point of view of Mussolini, Great Britain was the nigger in the League wood-pile. He had already seen to it that France, the traditional leader of the League policy, was "squared" through the North African frontier settlement and the person of M. Laval. Yet the head of the Italian Government was faced, within sixteen days of the beginning of his war in Abyssinia, with a scheme of sanctions. These were, it must be admitted, somewhat half-hearted; but, even so, they might cripple Italy if she was engaged in a long war. There is a cumulative effect in condemnation. If five sanctions could be approved in



Regatta - exercise and amusement with training -  
H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* in the background



## SECOND CHALLENGE

eight days, how many more in the next six or twelve months?

It must be remembered that, at this stage in the Abyssinian campaign, during which there had been virtually no fighting, Mussolini did not expect the conquest of Abyssinia to be completed before the onset of the annual rains in May 1936. These rains would hold up operations for the better part of six months. He therefore had to consider the effectiveness of economic siege for more than a year. It was true that any question of an oil embargo – the one thing feared by Italy in spite of large purchases from the refineries at Suez and elsewhere – had not then been mooted; but it might very well follow upon the first five sanctions.

In the circumstances Mussolini felt that, in self-preservation, he must adopt Lord Fisher's advice and "hit first."

On the very day on which the League of Nations formally condemned the Italian aggression in Abyssinia, Marshal Badoglio, the Chief of the Italian Military Staff, left Italy for East Africa "to examine still further the possibility of undertaking operations against the Sudanese front." Discussion between Badoglio and De Bono began on October 16th, when the imposition of sanctions by Geneva seemed to be accelerating.

De Bono was as strongly opposed to such a scheme as he had been seven weeks before, and he had little difficulty in convincing Badoglio that it was not practical. "They both, therefore, wired to Mussolini strongly advising him against a transference of the theatre of war westward," says Mr. Martelli in his well-documented book, *Italy against the World*. Mr. Martelli continues: "The cautious mentality induced in the military leaders by the threatening attitude of Britain is further shown by a telegram sent to Rome on October 18th, and containing recommendations drafted jointly by De Bono, Badoglio, and Signor Lessona, the Minister of Colonies, who was accompanying

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the Chief-of-Staff on his journey." This telegram requested that, "given the defensive attitude now to be assumed" (Mussolini had by his own order checked the advance of his armies in Abyssinia), the departure of further troops from Italy should be postponed.

In view of the extensive use of propaganda by Italy at that time, it is worth quoting a placating paragraph published in the *Popolo d'Italia* on October 16th – the day on which the Badoglio-De Bono discussion of action against Great Britain began: "The whole structure of the British Empire rests on the fleet and on naval bases. Italian expansion in East Africa does not threaten any of these forces. Massawa and Assab are simple ports of call, Mogadishu and Kisimayu are difficult for landing. . . ."

There is little doubt that at this moment – the middle of October 1935 – Mussolini was afraid of sanctions, and still more afraid of the British Navy. In such a position, a proud man who had already embarked upon a project, failure of which would mean the submergence of his country, his ideal, and himself, could only be expected to react in one way – that calculated to draw the teeth of his most dangerous adversary.

On October 18th there occurred in Alexandria harbour an incident which, although it turned out to be a matter of little importance, might have had the gravest consequences.

A large ship of the Italian Lloyd Triestino Shipping Company – the S.S. *Ausonia* – caught fire in somewhat mysterious circumstances in Alexandria harbour. In the excitement the Italian crew slipped the cables of the ship. The wind was southerly. To the north of the *Ausonia* lay the entrance to the harbour, guarded by the boom. Close to the harbour entrance lay a British ship heavily loaded with ammunition.

The British naval authorities acted promptly. Fire parties boarded the Italian liner – and received no assistance from its crew. Destroyers slipped their moor-

## SECOND CHALLENGE

ings and went alongside the burning ship. They grappled her great bulk, pushed, pulled, and cajoled her out of harm's way to a remote corner of the harbour. There the burning *Ausonia* was beached. Seldom has better seamanship been seen.

Had it not been for this prompt action by the British Navy, and the assistance of the Alexandria port authorities, the burning Italian liner would almost certainly have done one of two things. If she had drifted on to the ammunition ship, the resulting explosion might well have been as disastrous as that in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1915. If she had not fouled the ammunition ship, she would have sunk against the boom across the harbour entrance, blocking the entrance and imprisoning the British Fleet.

This incident may have been an accident due to one of the ordinary hazards of seafaring. If, however, you express this view to British officers who were serving at Alexandria at the time, they will look at you somewhat pityingly, and their only comment will be, "Perhaps." It is widely believed that the Italians sought to adopt the mediæval tactics of the fire-ship or the block-ship. Certainly the dates are significant.

Two days later the Lloyd Triestino Shipping Company issued a statement to the effect that, when fire broke out in the boiler-room of the S.S. *Ausonia* in Alexandria harbour, the crew and officers of the vessel were helped in a spirit of *camaraderie* by the crews of the British war vessels and by the authorities of the port of Alexandria. This statement appeared in the Rome newspapers – with the reference to British assistance carefully deleted.

Almost immediately after this incident there appears to have been some secret *rapprochement* between England and Italy. At all events, Mussolini was able to assure De Bono that there would "be no complications for us in Europe before the English election fixed for the middle of November." The second drive of the Italian armies in

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Abyssinia began. There was a definite easing of the tension in the Mediterranean. Admiral Sir William Fisher went on a cruise of inspection in his flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*.

From that date the tension in the Mediterranean began progressively to subside, although the British concentrations remained in being for several months.

It is not easy, with Europe still wobbling about eccentric axes, to assess the full effects of the Mediterranean emergency and the British naval concentration in that sea. Some points, however, stand out.

In the words of Mahan, the forces of Italy and Great Britain "met in a deadly strife in which no weapon was drawn" during the latter months of 1935 and the early part of 1936. The strife was one, not of arms, but of policies. War, which is but "a continuation of policy by other means," was averted. The British Fleet was, however, just as much the chief instrument in the strife of policies as it would have been the chief instrument in the event of war. The British Government acted upon the realisation of the great truth expressed by Lord Nelson when he said: "A fleet of British ships-of-war are the best negotiators in Europe." This truth had for years been submerged beneath new doctrines, rich in idealism but sadly lacking in realism.

The return to realism at home, as expressed, not only in the concentration of force in the Mediterranean and Red Sea, but also in the two Government White Papers on Defence, and the frequent utterances of Ministers, had a profound effect in the Royal Navy.

Deficiencies in stores and supplies were being made good. There was promise of more ships and more men. There was an end to the long and disheartening period in which officers and men had been faced with the inadequacy of material and personnel to carry out the tasks which would be demanded of them in war. No longer was there fear of further reductions. Under the new

## SECOND CHALLENGE

stimulus the beliefs and ideals of the Royal Navy again took shape after the lean and unhappy years which had led almost to their eclipse.

The late summer of 1935, which had seen the development of the great threat to vital British interests in the Mediterranean, had seen the sea power of the British Empire at its lowest ebb since the beginning of the century. Not only was this concerned with ships and material; it also affected the naval personnel, both in numbers and, to a lesser extent, in morale. Morale had reached its nadir in the winter of 1931, and since that time it had been struggling against odds for rehabilitation.

The end of the Mediterranean crisis saw a very different state of affairs. In every way the power and prestige of the Royal Navy was on the up-grade. The emergency had demonstrated once again the truth of Bacon's words: "He that commandeth the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much or as little of the war as he will."

The command of the sea in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea, which was exercised by the British naval concentrations, involved no warlike actions. It enabled the British Empire to take "as little of the war as he will" – and that was none at all. The grey ships at Alexandria, Port Said, Haifa, Aden, and other places were not merely the instruments of policy. The warships influenced and even dictated every move made by the diplomats, for it was upon the strength and disposition of the British Fleet that these depended for effectiveness.

Being in the right place at the right time did not by any means cover all the diplomatic activities of the Royal Navy during those nine months.

Since Alexandria became the main base of the British Fleet, and the Suez Canal ran through Egyptian territory, it was of paramount importance that the best of relations should exist between Great Britain and Egypt. Egypt is an independent Sovereign State. Its status as such was declared when Great Britain terminated the British



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Protectorate in February 1922. There were, of course, many important reservations to the complete independence of Egypt. It was these which gave Great Britain the right to base her fleet at Alexandria and to turn that place into a strongly defended port.

Legal rights, however, would have been of little avail in face of an unfriendly or hostile Egypt. For this reason Admiral Sir William Fisher and those under his command were most punctilious on all occasions in the acknowledgment of Egyptian sovereignty. They behaved as guests in the Egyptian ports, not as squatters exercising their legal rights. Many official calls were exchanged between the British Navy and the Egyptian authorities, and every opportunity was taken to cement Anglo-Egyptian friendship.

There were, however, among the extreme nationalists in Egypt, agitators who lost no opportunity of trying to stir up popular feeling against the British "occupation." These made the task of the British naval officers more difficult, particularly when they were concerned with such matters as setting up a club for the fleet. There was always the danger of any steps taken to prevent the swindling of the men of the fleet being construed as "robbing the Egyptians of their fair and just profits" and leading to a public outcry.

National independence, in its first years, is extremely sensitive. This is the more true when the independence is not yet complete, and when the armed forces of another Power are much in evidence. During the time that the British Fleet was based at Alexandria, the tender nationalistic susceptibilities of the Egyptians became offended. They began to wonder whether they were on the right side of the fence.

In the circumstances, suspicious feelings could not be allowed to remain in the breasts of the Egyptian Government. The British authorities on the spot, the High Commissioner, and the commanders of the three Services

## SECOND CHALLENGE

hastened to explain. It was also felt that it would help matters if the British Fleet gave to the Egyptian Cabinet an ocular demonstration of the power of the British Empire, and so dispose of any suspicions among those worthies that they might be backing the wrong horse.

A demonstration was immediately arranged, for which the Egyptian authorities went to sea in H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, the British flagship. The battleships carried out a full calibre firing with their 15-inch guns, close enough to the shore to give the windows of Alexandria a good shaking. The destroyers of the fleet attacked the heavy ships with torpedoes, coming in to attack at full speed, firing their torpedoes as they turned, and retiring behind a dense smoke-screen of their own laying. Aeroplanes from the aircraft carriers came swooping out of the sky to carry out dive bombing and torpedo attacks. Finally a torpedo from an unseen submarine crashed into the side of H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*.

The demonstration was very much of a "set piece," which made matters very easy for all concerned; but it was designed to impress, and this it certainly did. There was no denying the impression made upon the Egyptians when the first salvo of 15-inch shells "straddled" the distant target and enveloped it in spray, or when the target approached the ship after the firing and they saw that it had been almost cut in half. If on occasions the naval officers who were showing off their Navy to the Egyptian officials forsook the narrow path of veracity in extolling the power and efficiency of their weapons, who can blame them?

The "circus" was a great success, and the Egyptian politicians returned to the land quite convinced that they would be making a very great mistake if they did anything to sacrifice the friendship of Great Britain. The Royal Navy had once again shown its skill at diplomacy.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The Royal Navy's participation in the final acts of the Italo-Abyssinian War was also diplomatic, although dictated by the tradition of chivalry.

On the night of May 1st, 1936, the Emperor of Abyssinia sent his secretary to inform Sir Sidney Barton, the British Minister in Addis Ababa, of his decision to renounce the direction of affairs and leave Abyssinia. Just before dawn next morning the Emperor and his family boarded the train for Jibuti, in French Somaliland. When the party arrived at the coast, they found awaiting them the British cruiser H.M.S. *Enterprise*. This ship carried to Haifa the Emperor Haile Selassie, King of the Kings of Ethiopia, Son of Solomon, but no longer the conquering Lion of Judah.

The carrying into exile of the Emperor of Abyssinia by a British cruiser was diplomacy chiefly for home consumption. It helped to placate that vociferous section of the community in England which, faced with the fact of Italian conquest of Abyssinia, demanded more and better sanctions against Italy in order to prove that aggression did not pay. On the very day on which Marshal Badoglio entered the Abyssinian capital in triumph, a deputation from the League of Nations Union waited on Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Eden with the demand that steps should be taken to secure more effective action against Italy by the League of Nations.

Once again, a few weeks later, Haile Selassie travelled in a British cruiser. On May 23rd, 1936, he left Jerusalem, and he was taken to England by H.M.S. *Cape-town*. Although the Foreign Secretary announced that he would be expected "not to participate in any way in the furtherance of hostilities" while he was partaking of the hospitality of England, the mere presence of the Emperor proved a serious embarrassment. His arrival in London on June 3rd, 1936, gave a tremendous fillip to the campaign for the continuance and intensification of sanctions against Italy – and this at a time when the

## SECOND CHALLENGE

British Government was anxious to drop its support of the abortive League policy and patch up the quarrel with Italy. On June 10th – a week after the arrival of Haile Selassie in London – the Chancellor of the Exchequer described the continuance of sanctions against Italy as the “very midsummer of madness.”

The reason for this apparent change of policy on the part of the British Government was to be found in the new realism which had been one of the results of the threat of war. When, on December 19th, 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare delivered in the House of Commons his famous apologia for the Hoare-Laval peace plan, he said:

“Ever since I have been at the Foreign Office I have been obsessed with the urgency of two grave issues. Day in and day out I have been obsessed with the urgent necessity of doing everything in my power to prevent a European conflagration. Secondly, I have been no less obsessed with the urgent duty of doing everything in my power to avoid an isolated war with Italy. . . . There was trouble in the East; there was trouble in Egypt; there was trouble brewing in more than one quarter in Europe; and not least there was the depressing fact that the war seemed to be compromising British relations with a large body of public opinion in France. . . .”

Six months later Sir John Simon, the Home Secretary, declared in the House of Commons:

“The point is that, with the present situation in Europe and the great dangers surrounding us here at home, I am not prepared to see a single ship sunk even in a successful naval battle in the cause of Abyssinian independence.”

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Hitler had been forcing the pace with German rearmament, particularly in the air, ever since he had announced the reintroduction of conscription in March 1935. German troops had marched into the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland during the night of March 6th, 1936. The change in the British Government policy was clearly one of expediency rather than of the betrayal of ideals.

The Government had, moreover, taken note of other events in the Near East. While sanctions were still in force against Italy, and the majority of the ships of the Royal Navy were still concentrated in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea, trouble had broken out in Palestine. It had all the appearance of becoming extremely serious. It seemed that British rule, which had been so precariously balanced upon the two stools of the McMahon letter and the Balfour Declaration, was about to have a bad fall between them. The McMahon letter, which had been written to Sherif Hussein of Mecca on October 24th, 1915, promised Palestine to the Arabs in return for their assistance in the Great War. The Balfour Declaration of November 2nd, 1917, promised Palestine to the Jews as a national home.

Neither troops, aircraft, nor ships could be spared to suppress the revolt in Palestine without weakening the concentrations in Egypt. It was, therefore, extremely important that the cause of these concentrations – the quarrel with Italy – should be terminated with the least possible delay. This was made even more important by the fact that rumours soon began to circulate to the effect that Italy was behind the Arab revolt in Palestine, and was giving assistance to the rebels in money and arms.

It was therefore with a sigh of relief that the British Government received the decision of the League of Nations – arrived at by the Co-ordinating Committee on July 6th – that sanctions against Italy should come to an end on July 15th.

Before that date, however, the great concentration of



Alexandria during the 1935 crisis – destroyers lying alongside large cruisers



## SECOND CHALLENGE

British naval strength in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea had begun to break up. But before the ships left Alexandria there was an event which is worth recording, since it shows the spirit with which the fleet had endured its long vigil under conditions approximating closely to those of war. A grand regatta was held, in which the ships which had come from all over the world to help protect the threatened centre took part, and there was a general round of gaiety.

The future, however, held little of peace for the Mediterranean Fleet.



## CHAPTER XVI

### PALESTINE

**Palestine troubles – patrols to stop gun-running – the Navy takes over the Haifa customs – anxiety over oil pipe line – bombs, ambushes, and fires**

ON FRIDAY, APRIL 17TH, 1936, a bus was travelling from Jerusalem to Jaffa when it was "held up" by an Arab gang, and one of the passengers of the bus, an elderly Jew, was shot dead. On the following day, during the funeral at Jaffa of the victim of this outrage, there was a clash between Arabs and Jews. The clash occurred on the boundary of the old Arab town of Jaffa and the new Jewish town of Tel-Aviv – the Brighton of the Palestine coast. There was considerable loss of life before order was restored by the Palestine police.

This episode seemed to be the signal for a general flare-up all over Palestine. Arab hostility to the influx of Jews had been growing for years, aided, rather than hindered, by a British administration which seemed to be for ever bent upon postponing the day of reckoning. Three days later a general strike was declared by the Arab Higher Committee, the chief of the hundreds of committees representing Arab interests in Palestine. The general strike had three main objectives, and each one of these had for years been considered matters of elementary right by the whole of the Arab population. These were: that the influx of Jews by migration into Palestine should cease; that no further land should be sold to Jews; and that the country should in future be ruled by a representative national Government. In this case the word "national" meant Arab.

## PALESTINE

The general strike was accompanied by disorder throughout Palestine, much of which was nothing more nor less than terrorism. There were frequent Arab demonstrations against Jews. Jewish crops, orchards, and houses were set on fire, and bombs were thrown at Jewish gatherings; while Jewish settlements were constantly sniped by Arab rifles from the surrounding hills. More serious still, the Arab movement became one against the established order. Roads were blocked and ambushes laid upon them. Sabotage occurred on the railways, particularly at bridges. Rifle fire was frequently opened upon police and military patrols and stations. It was not long before all road traffic had to proceed in guarded convoys, and even these and the railway trains became targets for the rifles of hidden Arabs.

At the time of the outbreak the British naval forces off the Palestine coast consisted of three cruisers – H.M.S. *Delhi*, H.M.S. *Durban*, and H.M.S. *Adventure* – and two destroyers. More destroyers soon arrived to reinforce this squadron, as also did minesweeping trawlers manned by the Royal Naval Reserve. The whole of this force was based on Haifa.

At first sight there appeared to be little that the Navy could do in a situation which was concerned almost entirely with disorders inland. However, two of the cruisers raised steam immediately in case they should be required at Jaffa, and all the ships prepared to land armed parties to assist the police and the military in case of need. It was not then clear how serious the Palestine situation was to become, or how accurately history was to repeat itself.

The tactics of the Arabs in 1936 were exactly the same as those of the time of the occupation of the country by the Roman Empire nearly 2,000 years before: "It was not their policy to invite a siege or offer a pitched battle. The Romans were taken unawares, and the troops upon the spot were unable to cope with the insurrection."

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

More remarkable still, this quotation from *The Origins of Christianity* goes on to say: "Even the fleet took part in the operations."

During May and June of 1936 the naval activities consisted of the provision of landing-parties to protect property, occasional fire-fighting after acts of incendiarism, and the formation from the engine-room personnel of a trained reserve of engine-drivers and firemen for the Palestine railways, in case the ordinary personnel joined in the strike. Destroyers visited Jaffa from time to time in order to assist in minor police and military operations, and to play their part in restoring confidence.

Towards the end of June 1936 the situation in Palestine deteriorated considerably. The Royal Navy then began to take a more active, and frequently conspicuously non-naval, part in this unorthodox and troublesome warfare.

The first task entrusted to the Navy was the patrolling of the coast, since reports were frequently being received of arms being smuggled into the country by sea. These reports were usually linked with the rumours of arms being supplied by Italy. The credibility of these rumours may be judged from the fact that, throughout the months in which a close blockade of the coast was maintained by the British Navy, not a single case of gun-running was detected. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the blockading patrols had a very healthy deterrent effect. Had they not been instituted, an extensive arms traffic by sea would almost certainly have grown up. Sea patrols of the whole coast of Palestine were instituted on June 26th, 1936, at the request of General Sir Arthur Wauchope, the British High Commissioner.

The coast of Palestine is 140 miles long, and the efficiency of the patrol system can be gauged from the fact that the normal combined destroyer and trawler patrol steamed a total distance of 1,300 miles during a forty-eight-hour patrol period. The patrol consisted of

## PALESTINE

two to four vessels at sea at a time. Destroyers and trawlers – the vessels bought by the Admiralty and sent to the Eastern Mediterranean as minesweepers during the Italo-Abyssinian conflict – were employed on this patrol until the beginning of August, when the whole of the patrol duties were taken over by the trawlers.

The ships on patrol always carried a police or customs officer. Some of these were at first somewhat handicapped by the unaccustomed movement of their "beat." Although they were given a special money allowance to pay for their keep on board, orders had to be issued that they were not to be charged for meals, particularly in trawlers, when they had had nothing to eat for forty-eight hours.

There was no doubt about the efficiency of the off-shore patrols. During the whole time that the patrol was in force only one vessel is known to have reached the coast unsearched, while it is on record that in the early days of the patrol, when there was a certain amount of overlapping, one particular vessel in the northern area was stopped and searched no less than seven times before she reached Haifa.

Off the Palestine coast the traffic in native sailing-craft is to a great extent seasonal, reaching its peak in the summer, when the melons are ripe. At this period the naval patrol ships were stopping and searching vessels at the rate of anything up to 150 a week. The searching of vessels intercepted was always most thoroughly carried out, although the complicated, and by western standards unorthodox, methods of stowing cargo made the process slow and laborious. One of the favourite Arab methods of smuggling is to suspend the forbidden goods in a bag attached by a rope or wire to the keel plate of a vessel. To circumvent this trick, care was always taken to pass a line under the whole length of the keel of any vessel being searched.

Nearly all the small craft using the Palestine ports

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

were manned by Arabs, who gave the minimum of trouble to the searching officers.

On one occasion, when a destroyer boarded a small melon-boat in the early days of the blockade, the naval officer in charge of the boarding-party ordered the Arab skipper to have his crew fallen in to be searched, while he inspected the hold. When he returned to the upper deck he found the entire crew fallen in in their "birthday suits" ready for inspection. The skipper had perhaps heard rumours of the thoroughness of the British Navy.

Boats were used not only for boarding purposes, but for patrolling close in-shore at night in order to intercept small native craft attempting to evade search. The fast motor-boats of the First Destroyer Flotilla were particularly useful for intercepting vessels.

One of these boats had an adventure which might easily have ended in tragedy. The boat went aground during the night and a destroyer trained her searchlight on it to assist the efforts of the crew to refloat it. A mounted police patrol was in the vicinity, and, seeing the searchlight beam, thought that it was being used to draw its attention to a party of smugglers. The men of the patrol galloped to the edge of the cliff above the boat and unslung their rifles. The boat's crew, seeing what they took to be an armed gang of Arabs, also prepared to open fire. A pitched battle was averted by the policeman accompanying the boat, who recognised the metal accoutrements of the supposed brigands reflected in the glare of the searchlight and let out a bellow of "Don't shoot."

Apart from the sea patrols, the Royal Navy assisted in preventing the smuggling of arms and ammunition by stiffening the customs department at Haifa. In normal times the Palestine customs department at Haifa consists of a very few British officers and a Palestinian personnel which, although adequate at normal times, laid a net of too large mesh for emergency. A naval force of one warrant officer and seventy men from the cruiser

## PALESTINE

H.M.S. *Durban* was landed at Haifa in June 1936. Not only did this force control all the customs gates to the port area, but it patrolled the whole area to prevent pistols or ammunition being thrown or dropped over the high wire-netting fence of the area.

As is always the case when the British sailor is called upon to do something outside his usual routine, the men tackled their new job with tremendous enthusiasm. A new efficiency at once became apparent in the searching of persons passing through the gates. Local inhabitants, who had been in the habit of driving past the customs guards in a lordly manner, found themselves stopped by a polite but firm bluejacket, who insisted upon their getting out of their cars so that the seats could be removed and the cars thoroughly searched. It was quite possible for some quite innocent motorist to be the means of smuggling arms, for among the tricks of the Arab was the concealing of arms and ammunition in the cars of persons not likely to be suspected of smuggling. These arms were later extracted from the cars by a chauffeur or some garage.

It says much for the tact with which the naval men carried out their duties that they achieved great thoroughness without giving offence, even when the manager of the local bank was stopped and searched four times in one day. A Palestine customs official was always available in case of argument, but he was very seldom called upon. A woman searcher was also available for searching any women about whom there was any doubt, but an American lady averred on one occasion that she would much rather be searched by a British bluejacket than any woman searcher.

The work of these naval customs guards was by no means unfruitful. Several arms smugglers were apprehended and a quantity of arms seized. One Jewish immigrant, when he was patted round the middle by a naval rating on customs guard duty, protested rather too

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

vehemently that he had recently undergone a serious operation and that he must not be touched. He was taken to the search-room, where it was discovered that his "serious operation" had consisted of a pistol and fifty rounds of ammunition being closely bandaged round his body.

Customs duties did not comprise the whole of the shore-going activities of the naval forces in Palestine, even in the early months of the trouble. During the first six weeks of the revolt there were stores of oil fuel and a naval supply depot at Haifa, both of which had been instituted during the first weeks of the emergency arising out of the Italo-Abyssinian War. These essentially naval commitments were guarded by the Royal Marine detachment from H.M.S. *Durban* until June 1936, when the oil tanks were emptied and the naval supply depot was demobilised. The detachment, consisting of one officer and twenty men, lived in old army huts, and found their task very boring, for no attempt was ever made upon the depot or the oil tanks.

The life of the oil pipe from Mosul was by no means so peaceful, particularly during May and June of 1936, when it was constantly being damaged by Arab raiders. The following conversation, recorded by Mr. Douglas Duff in his book *Palestine Picture*, gives a graphic picture of the extent to which the oil pipe line proved an anxiety to the authorities during the revolt. The scene is near Nazareth, the conversation with a sergeant of the Palestine police.

" 'What is all the wind up about?'

" 'The ruddy pipe line has been cut again. A few rounds of rifle ammunition fired at it near Kaukab el Howa, and the darned thing has caught fire. I wish that they would make a good job of it and blow the whole thing sky-high. We should be able to get some sleep then, because the job of patrolling it is taking half the men we've got.'

## PALESTINE

“ ‘What about your other duties? Have you got enough men to guard life and property?’ ”

“ ‘We’re supposed to have, and, if it wasn’t for that confounded pipe line, we should have. But dollars are more important than lives, seemingly, and shareholders must have their dividends.’ ”

In June a bomb was thrown into the grounds of the Newton House Naval Club at Haifa. There were no casualties, and the chief damage was that a large window was blown in. This happened to be in close proximity to the beer bar, which two naval ratings had just entered. They had just ordered their drinks when the explosion occurred. Some moments later, when commotion and dust was subsiding and the barman was returning to an upright position behind his counter, the first remark heard was from one of the naval men. “Well, what about my two beers?” he demanded, as if resenting the delay in service caused by a mere bomb.

As a result of this outrage a naval armed guard of one petty officer and six men was landed each night to watch the grounds and approaches to the club, but no further bombs were ever thrown. Perhaps the terrorists heard the story of the beer and decided that they were wasting valuable ammunition.

The latter part of July 1936 saw a further deterioration in the Palestine situation, and the Royal Navy was called upon to give increased assistance ashore. As a result of disturbances in Haifa, in which a policeman was wounded and an Arab killed and two others wounded, the military authorities asked for naval reinforcements. Two platoons of seamen from the cruiser H.M.S. *Sussex*, which, if times had been normal, would have been serving as a unit of the Royal Australian Navy, were landed. A large landing-party was also organised in the cruiser H.M.S. *Arethusa*. This landing-party, which was known as the Haifa Reserve Company, was kept ready to land at short notice.



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Early in August 1936 the Royal Navy took over responsibility for the control of the whole of Haifa, thus releasing police and military for operations inland. It was understood in the first place that naval platoons would "stand by" in their ships and be landed only in case of emergency.

This was not long in coming. On August 8th the majority of the railway personnel and the employees of the Iraq Petroleum Company went on strike without warning. During the next two days the strike spread to most of the Government Departments. Serious disturbances were feared, and would almost certainly have occurred had it not been for the prompt action of the naval authorities. On the day of the outbreak of the strike four platoons of seamen were landed from the ships, and a further five platoons were landed on the following day. In addition, a half platoon of seamen from the submarine depot ship, H.M.S. *Cyclops*, replaced the Arab *ghaffirs* who had suddenly refused duty at the Shell Oil Installation.

This force, which was known as the Haifa Town Force, was accommodated in improvised billets in the town itself. These varied from comfortable quarters in the British Sailors' Society Home to railway trucks at the station. It thus had a far greater effect than the military force which it had superseded, for this had lived in barracks a mile outside the town. The Arabs, moreover, had a healthy respect for the Navy. This was largely due to ignorance of the capabilities of the warships. The Arab knew the Palestine police and the military, but the Navy was to him an unknown quantity, and, as such, something not to be lightly treated. He believed the situation to be as summed up by a naval stoker who was travelling in an Arab bus when the driver asked him what would happen if a British sailor was injured by Arab rioters. "If a sailor were hurt in Haifa to-night, to-morrow you'd wake up to find Haifa in Acre," replied

## PALESTINE

the stoker without any hesitation. Acre lies northwards from Haifa, fifteen miles across the bay.

The naval platoons comprising the Haifa Town Force were victualled from their ships, and considerable ingenuity was used in evolving a method of supplying hot meals to the men ashore. The most successful method was by means of "hot boxes." These were made on board the ships, the best pattern being eighteen inches in width and depth and two feet three inches long. The boxes were lined with asbestos, and had recessed lids and shelves for trays. A hot firebrick was put into each box, and only removed just before the box left the ship. By this means it was possible to supply hot meals to units billeted half an hour away from the ships.

At the end of August arrangements were made for the withdrawal of the naval and Royal Marine platoons from Haifa town. The withdrawal, however, was shortlived, owing to the continued activities of terrorists and intimidators in the town, and the Haifa Town Force of seamen and Royal Marines again took control.

The naval men thoroughly enjoyed being ashore. The more warlike they looked the better pleased they were. "Tin hats" were always carried. The sailors asked that these should always be worn when ashore, but one or two very hot days in midsummer soon cured them of that desire.

Relations between the Navy, the Army, and the police were invariably excellent, and there was much fraternising. In order that the naval men landed at Haifa should know what they might be up against, the Loyal Regiment gave the Navy demonstrations of street fighting. These were most life-like, and those of the Loyals who were dressed up as Arabs for the occasion proved themselves very efficient rioters who never wanted to stop rioting.

A large number of arrests were made by the Navy during the period in which it controlled Haifa. These were mostly for carrying arms or for intimidation. One

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Arab was discovered going off for a week-end with a suitcase which, when searched, was found to contain twenty detonators, three lengths of fuse, three sticks of gelignite, some rounds of ammunition, a dagger, and assorted tools. The only disturbance of note which occurred during the period was the firing of six shots at a naval patrol in Haifa one night. The shots were fired at about thirty yards range, but, fortunately, none of them took effect. The gunman got away.

The shore-going activities of the Royal Navy were not confined to the control of Haifa. Bluejackets and Royal Marines took part in several expeditions inland during July, when serious disturbances and Arab attacks on Jewish settlements were feared.

On July 24th the brigadier in command of the military forces in the northern area of Palestine asked for reinforcements from the Royal Navy. He had received information that Arab bands were proposing to carry out night attacks on Jewish settlements near Acre, in the Plain of Esdraelon between Acre and Haifa, and on the southern slopes of Mount Carmel; and he had not sufficient troops to guard all the possible points of attack. Three platoons of Royal Marines were promptly landed – two from H.M.S. *Sussex* and one from H.M.S. *Arethusa*.

On the night of July 24th these platoons took up ambush positions close to the tracks by which the Arab forces were expected to attack the Jewish settlements in the Plain of Acre. Apart, however, from some casual sniping, nothing happened. No Arabs were seen, and the Royal Marines were withdrawn just before daylight. It seems certain that the Arabs had been warned of the presence of strong British forces.

July 27th, 1936, was the hundredth day of the general strike, and it was expected that considerable demonstrations and disturbances would take place. In particular, it was expected that an Arab attack upon a Jewish settlement outside Acre would take place, and the

## PALESTINE

expectation was reinforced by secret information. Again the military authorities asked the Navy for assistance, and a platoon of Royal Marines was sent to Acre to reinforce the military detachment there. Again, however, the Marines, much to their disappointment, drew a blank, and they were withdrawn early next morning. Shortly after this episode orders were issued that these nocturnal expeditions were to cease and that the work of the naval and Royal Marine landing-parties was to be restricted to Haifa.

At Haifa the Royal Navy gained great experience in dealing with large fires started by Arab incendiarism. Although Haifa was a very large town, its only fire-engine was an ancient and very wheezy machine quite incapable of dealing effectively with a respectable fire. During April, May, August, and September there were several large fires in Haifa. Nearly all these were in timber-yards owned by Jews, or by Arabs suspected of "black-leg" tendencies towards the general strike and the Arab national movement. On every occasion large fire-parties were landed from the British warships in the bay to help the local fire brigade.

Timber-yard fires are notoriously difficult to deal with. Often there was no chance of extinguishing the blaze, and all efforts had to be concentrated on preventing the fire from spreading. Not only did this entail a tremendous amount of hard work against time, but it was usually dangerous. Quite apart from the danger of a large timber-stack falling, the Arabs were given, on occasions when they set light to a timber-yard, to setting unpleasant "booby traps" in the form of bombs concealed amid the burning timber.

On one occasion three or four bombs were found concealed amongst burning timber, and a Royal Marine from H.M.S. *Arethusa* was severely wounded when one of these exploded as he was picking it up to render it harmless. For this most gallant action in trying to save his fellows Marine Denis Jones was subsequently

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

decorated with the Distinguished Service Medal.

For most of their work in extinguishing or localising fires in the timber-yards of Haifa the Royal Navy got more kicks than thanks. In one case — that of a large fire for which as many as 24 officers and 292 men, including 72 men of the Royal Naval Reserve from the trawlers, were landed — hundreds of baulks of timber and planks were moved to places safe from the spread of the fire. The owner remarked rather bitterly, "It took me five months to stack that timber, and now the Navy has moved the whole — lot in two hours."

In nearly every case of incendiarism in timber-yards the owners of the timber were unconcerned, and in many cases they were apparently most anxious that the wood should not be salvaged. The crowning ingratitude from the owner of a timber-yard where incendiarism had taken place was the case of a man who wrote to the naval authorities demanding to be told the name of the officer who had been in charge of the fire-fighting parties. Some of the wood which had been moved to safety in order to localise the fire had subsequently been stolen. He considered that the officer who had given orders for the wood to be removed was responsible, and proposed to claim damages from him.

In all the various operations ashore in and around Haifa during the Arab revolt, the naval personnel found opportunity for invaluable training and the closest co-operation with the personnel both of the Army and the Royal Air Force. Cheerfulness was the great characteristic, and the *Times* of Malta was fully justified in its remark of September 27th, 1936:

"The Royal Navy turn out at Haifa with hearty grins all over their faces, put out fires, take on bandits, muck in with everybody, search all the port workers and make them laugh over it, carry out liaison work with the police as if they were police themselves."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SHIPS OF THE LAND

Making armoured lorries – Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred – the Navy takes over the railways – production of armoured trains – the “Jordan Queen” – military reinforcements arrive and take over

ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS ASPECTS of the disorders in Palestine in the summer of 1936 was the interruption of transport.

In normal times a great deal of the transport of Palestine is carried on the roads, which are good, although usually narrow, hilly, and winding. This suited the Arab raiding tactics very well, and they proceeded to carry on a “tip and run” warfare against road transport of all types, although Jewish cars and omnibuses received the most unwelcome attentions.

Arab gangs began by sniping at road traffic from the hills, but soon became bolder, laying cunning ambushes and committing acts of sabotage on the roads, such as building barricades of boulders across them or damaging bridges. The passengers in a vehicle brought to a standstill by any obstruction had no chance against the withering fire poured into them by Arabs concealed on both sides of the roadway.

The task of running any of these gangs to earth presented practically insurmountable difficulties, for the Arabs would, after carrying out an ambush or raid, promptly disappear into caves and “hidey holes” in the remote fastnesses of the hills. The convoying of road traffic was tried, and this met with some success. It demanded, however, greater resources than were available.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Moreover, the tortuous nature of many of the roads made it possible for sections of a convoy to be attacked while the protective escorts were powerless around the corner.

So successful were the Arab terrorists in their guerilla warfare against transport that road traffic was brought almost to a standstill, for neither Jew nor Arab would willingly risk driving an unprotected car, bus, or lorry.

Such was the state of affairs when, in June 1936, the Royal Navy suggested that lorries with naval two-pounder pom-pom guns from the ships mounted upon them might prove useful and terrifying weapons against Arab bandits.

No sooner was the suggestion made than it was adopted, and the fitting out of an experimental vehicle of this type was begun. A large five-ton commercial lorry was strengthened, and steel plates were fitted round the forward ends of each side. Protective mattresses were lashed inside the body of the lorry to prevent bullets from ricocheting around inside the vehicle, and the glass wind-screen and side-windows of the cab were removed. The Jewish driver viewed this latter modification with considerable misgiving, feeling that he was being deprived of protection, but he was soon consoled by the present of a "tin hat."

When all was ready, and the gun mounted, the lorry was painted Mediterranean warship grey and the crest of the ship by which it was manned was tastefully picked out on each side of the cab. Then, with a crew of one officer and five naval ratings, in addition to the Jewish driver, the product of the ingenuity of H.M.S. *Arethusa* set out for Nablus, the centre of most of the Arab warfare against road traffic.

On its maiden voyage it was sniped, and it came into action with commendable efficiency. The Arab terrorists were obviously taken completely unawares by the appearance of this very noisy monster which replied to rifle

## SHIPS OF THE LAND

bullets with a stream of high-explosive shells. The sniping of road traffic during daylight in the vicinity of Nablus stopped at once.

Thus there came into being a new type of naval craft. There is in the story of these lorries something reminiscent of the wartime tenet that the tanks, being "land-battleships," should be the property of the Navy.

The pom-pom lorry, although it was built and prepared by the Royal Navy, worked with the Army. Everybody knows that everything in the British Army has to have its abbreviated name. So the pom-pom lorry was christened "Pip" – a name which later became "Pip-one" when more "Pips" came into service.

"Pip" usually worked alone along the roads in the neighbourhood of Nablus. It was very effective by day, but it soon became clear that there was a need for adequate illumination so that it could work as effectively by night. The result was the evolution of a searchlight lorry.

A ten-inch signalling searchlight and a generator to provide the power for the light were mounted on a lorry. The searchlight was mounted on a portable field tripod which had been supplied for the Shore Signal Station at Haifa during the Italo-Abyssinian campaign. The tripod and the generator were bolted down to the floor of the lorry, which was strengthened by the fitting of steel "strongbacks." The sides of the lorry were protected by armour plate and it was lined with protective mattresses. The lamp itself was fitted with a special steel shield a quarter-inch thick, which was made by a local firm of ironworkers and fitted by the Royal Army Service Corps.

The searchlight lorry was manned by two naval ratings apart from the driver. It was known as "S/L." This is the normal naval abbreviation for "searchlight," but in this case it became an abbreviation for "searchlight-lorry." In spite of the fact that "S/L" was frequently



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in action with Arabs, who, not unnaturally, aimed at the light, it never came to grief.

The combination of "Pip" and "S/L" proved so successful in dealing with Arab terrorism on the roads at night that the military authorities – in co-operation with whom they worked, although they were manned by naval personnel – were soon crying out for more. During the following three months six "Pips" and "S/L's" were produced by the Navy.

Once the necessary lorries had been found, the construction of "Pips" proved comparatively easy, for the guns were disembarked from the warships. The production of "S/L's" was not nearly so easy, for it was hard to come by the searchlights, and, more particularly, the generators to supply them with current at the correct voltage. The lamps for the "S/L's" were collected from places as far away as Port Sudan, Port Tewfik, and Alexandria; at all of which ports war signal stations had been established during the emergency of the previous autumn.

The generating plants for the searchlights were improvised from all manner of queer sources. Two sets were converted from dockyard salvage lighting plants from Malta. One set consisted of a five-kilowatt electric motor, bought in Jaffa for £15, and a borrowed lorry engine. These were coupled together by a steel plate, which was bolted to the clutch plate of the engine and keyed to the motor shaft, and the whole outfit was mounted on wood strapped with metal bands. In another case the necessary generating plant was made up from a small skiff's engine from the submarine H.M.S. *Clyde* and a spare submarine's 100-volt generator from the submarine depot ship H.M.S. *Cyclops*.

The "Pips" and "S/L's" were based upon various towns all over Palestine, and their crews were billeted in army barracks and camps. The naval lorry crews wore khaki uniform, helmets and shirts and shorts being obtained



The key to the Mediterranean – “the Rock,” with destroyers, a battleship,  
and a seaplane of the Fleet Air Arm



## SHIPS OF THE LAND

from army stores. These were worn with blue stockings and black shoes or boots. A red, white, and blue "flash" in the puggarees of their helmets completed a very smart uniform for active service wear. There is evidence, however, that even this uniform, improvised in defiance of the naval uniform regulations, was forsaken by the crews of some "Pips" and "S/L's." In any event, it was rumoured that the quartermaster's store of the Cameron Highlanders ran out of "ready to wear" kilts.

Fired by enthusiasm at the success of the naval pom-pom lorries, the Royal Artillery mounted a three-pounder gun, which had originally been provided for the local defence of the port of Haifa, on a heavy lorry. This weapon was used to provide deliberate fire against the stone-built "sangars" used as cover by Arab snipers. It did good work, and in August it was taken over by the Royal Navy. Out of deference to the naval "Pips," the Royal Artillery gave to this lorry the appropriate name of "Squeak." When the Army improvised a searchlight lorry of their own, and named it "Wilfred," the famous trio was complete.

It says much for the efficiency and reliability of the Jewish drivers of the "Pips" and "S/L's" that only one of the lorries came to an untimely end. This was "Pip Six." Its brakes failed, and it "ran away" down a very steep hill, apparently in an effort to emulate the Gadarene swine and rush down a steep place into the Sea of Galilee. Fortunately the crew escaped with a shaking, and the pom-pom gun was undamaged.

The artillery and searchlight assistance given to the Army also included equipment for the better defence of the large military camp at Nablus. This camp was badly sited. It was in the bowl of a narrow valley with steep, rocky sides, and snipers on the surrounding hills made themselves very troublesome. In the first place a searchlight unit was provided to assist in preventing sniping of the camp at night. Later two 3·7-inch howitzers were

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

landed from the cruiser H.M.S. *Sussex* and mounted in gun-pits in Nablus camp.

Once these guns were in place, the crack of a sniper's rifle was immediately answered by a few rounds from the howitzers. This noisy and highly dangerous retaliation very soon convinced the Arabs that sniping the camp was an unprofitable pastime, apt to be attended by unpleasant consequences.

Both the searchlight and the howitzers at Nablus were manned entirely by naval crews. The searchlight was eventually replaced by two lights from an anti-aircraft searchlight battalion of the Royal Engineers, while the naval howitzers were relieved by the famous "Chestnut Troop" of the Royal Horse Artillery, which arrived from Egypt.

While the "Pips" and their satellites the "S/L's," aided by "Squeak" and "Wilfred," were busy driving terrorism off the roads of Palestine, the Royal Navy was also playing its part in the maintenance of the railway communications of the country. These are complicated, for in the Palestine railways there are both broad and narrow gauges.

When the general strike was declared, one of the chief pre-occupations of the authorities was railway communication. It was feared that the strike might cripple the railways of the country. This would have been a serious matter, since the strike at the Arab town of Jaffa had virtually closed that port to shipping, and all cargoes were being handled at Haifa, whence distribution was very largely by rail.

Running a railway is not usually considered one of the accomplishments of the seaman, but the authorities immediately turned to the Royal Navy for help. This flattering attention was due partly to the faith of the average landsman in the sailor as a handyman, and partly to the knowledge that all the other forces already had their hands more than full on account of the strike and

## SHIPS OF THE LAND

the terrorism and disturbances which it brought in its wake.

With the assistance of ten volunteers from ships at Alexandria, thirteen naval "crews," each consisting of an engine-driver and fireman, were formed. These went ashore from their ships every morning and spent the whole day undergoing practical training on the railways. At the same time other naval ratings were being trained as signalmen and in all the other duties involved in the control of traffic on a railway.

In a short three weeks from the start of their training these naval engine-drivers, firemen, and so on, were passed by the railway authorities as fit to take charge of trains should the necessity arise. As it happened, the Arab personnel of the Palestine railways stuck to their jobs. There is no doubt that the presence of naval men on the footplates and elsewhere, even though they were only undergoing training to fit them to take the place of drivers and firemen if they did go out on strike, proved a great steadying influence. There is less incentive to join in a strike, particularly a "sympathetic" strike in support of a rather nebulous "cause," if it is continually demonstrated that other men are only too ready to carry on and prevent dislocation.

The naval "crews," accompanied by a naval armed guard of two men, travelled on all the important trains. Not only were these men learning all the time, but they were acting as protectors and friends to the Arab drivers and firemen. It was a hot, dusty, and trying job, but the naval men enjoyed it; the more so, perhaps, because there was always the chance of a bomb, a missing rail, or a rifle bullet round the next bend.

In August 1936 the Arab extremists made a concentrated effort to make the railwaymen at Haifa join the strike in support of the "cause." The intimidation resorted to by the Arabs was so serious that the Arab drivers and firemen were forced temporarily to leave

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

their work. The Royal Navy, with its small railway-trained personnel, immediately took over control, and maintained a sixty-per-cent service for ten days. The continuation of the railway service had the desired effect, and the railwaymen duly returned to their work.

Sabotage of the railways was frequently resorted to by the Arabs, and it proved to be one of the most difficult things to check. The Arabs became extremely adept at removing rails, placing bombs and small land-mines on the line, obstructing the track, and so on. They even went so far as to grease the rails in order to counteract the effect of brakes. Another and most unpleasant form of sabotage, because of the difficulty in seeing it, was the widening of the gauge so that trains came off the rails. On one occasion sabotage of the line led to serious injuries being received by two naval men.

One wonders whether, in these activities, the Arabs drew inspiration from the exploits of Lawrence of Arabia in obstructing and interrupting the Turkish railway traffic between Damascus and Medina during the Great War. "Ali Ibn el Hussein, who had heard of the performances below Maan, and was as Arab as any Arab, said, 'Let's blow up a train,' " wrote Colonel T. E. Lawrence in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

The military forces in Palestine were not sufficiently numerous to allow of a comprehensive scheme of pickets and patrols to be extended over the whole of the railway system. All that could be done was to carry out patrols of the line by trolleys. This proved an inadequate safeguard against sabotage of the permanent way, and in July 1936 the idea of a naval armoured train to work along the broad-gauge line between Jaffa, Lydda, and Jerusalem was mooted.

The work of preparing this armoured train was hurried forward. When it was completed it consisted of three twelve-ton goods wagons, protected by armour plate, which was made in the railway workshops. The equip-

## SHIPS OF THE LAND

ment of the train, which was arranged and carried out entirely by the Royal Navy, consisted of two two-pounder pom-pom guns dismounted from British warships, two Vickers machine guns, eight Lewis guns, a ten-inch searchlight with its own electric generating plant, and a wireless transmitting and receiving set.

The wireless set of this train, which was known as "Q.T.1," was a somewhat Heath-Robinson affair which gave a maximum range of communication of about thirty miles – if the train was stopped. It worked on an aerial laid along the roof of a wagon and mounted on bags of sponges, since other insulating and shock-absorbing material was not available. It was not long before the electric power generator of this wireless set gave up the ghost. A spare was demanded from Alexandria, and this arrived in a flying-boat on the following day – surely a record of quick replacement by a stores department, particularly in view of the delivery distance of more than 250 miles.

"Q.T.1" was manned entirely by naval personnel, including the driver and fireman. The crew, which consisted of two officers and thirty-one men, was drawn from the cruisers H.M.S. *Arethusa*, H.M.S. *Delhi*, and H.M.S. *Durban*. This train had a short life, however, for at the beginning of August more troops became available to picket this broad-gauge main line, and "Q.T.1" was dismantled.

Another armoured train was, however, fitted out and manned by the Royal Navy. This was "Q.T.2." It was a narrow-gauge train for operation along the narrow-gauge line between Haifa and Semakh, at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. This line runs south-east from Haifa down the Valley of Jezreel and then turns north up the Valley of the Jordan. "Q.T.2" used to patrol this line practically every night, and it was accorded the unofficial but proud title of "The Jordan Queen."

"The Jordan Queen" consisted of engine and tender



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

and two large trucks, upon which were mounted one two-pounder pom-pom, two Vickers machine guns, and six Lewis guns. The train also had a searchlight with its own generating plant. It was rigged up by the cruiser H.M.S. *Sussex*, and had an entirely naval crew from the same ship, among whom was an instructor lieutenant-commander and a naval schoolmaster.

"Q.T.2" had an exciting and successful career. Its sector of line was always dangerous, particularly in the places where it had to pass through deep cuttings in the hills between the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel. These afforded excellent opportunities for ambush, in which the Arabs could fire down upon the train. The Valley of Jezreel has been notorious for banditry since biblical times.

One night the train was actually ambushed and subjected to heavy rifle fire from the banks of a cutting about thirty feet deep. It was impossible to make adequate reply, since the only weapons which could be given the requisite elevation – nearly eighty degrees – were rifles. The train crew, however, opened such a hot fire with these that the Arab fire became erratic, and finally ceased altogether. There were no casualties on board "The Jordan Queen."

By September 1936 large reinforcements of troops had arrived in Palestine, and the military authorities were able to take over the protection of both road and rail transport. Two battalions of troops were employed on railway protection alone – the Lincolnshire Regiment in one area and the Hampshire Regiment in another. In order to provide for even more systematic patrol of the railway lines, the army evolved a new type of patrolling craft to replace the armoured trains. These were rail trolleys on which were mounted Ford V 8 engines to provide the motive power. They were armour-plated, and fitted with machine guns.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of the Admiralty,

## SHIPS OF THE LAND

paid tribute to the naval armoured train in a speech on September 4th, 1936, after his visit to Haifa. "Once again the Navy has readily met an unexpected emergency. If I wanted an example of its adaptability, what better could I have than the armoured train fitted out and manned by naval personnel?"

In September 1936 the military were able to take over all the tasks of the Royal Navy, apart from the maintenance of the coastal patrols to guard against gun-running.

It was as well that this was so, for already the hard-worked ships of the Mediterranean Fleet were being urgently required to deal with a dangerous situation which had arisen at the opposite end of the Mediterranean.

The Spanish Civil War had flared up, and already it had assumed serious proportions. The safety of shipping was threatened, and the possibility of a spread of hostilities beyond the frontiers of Spain could not be discounted.

By the end of September the direction of the whole of the purely naval operations in Palestine had been taken over by the battleship H.M.S. *Valiant*, which was berthed inside the harbour at Haifa. The coast patrols continued to be carried out by half a dozen trawlers, for the general strike in Palestine did not collapse until October 12th. These trawlers had, however, been paid off and recommissioned. Their Royal Naval Reserve crews had gone home, and they were now manned by active service personnel of the Royal Navy.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

Outbreak of Spanish Civil War – protecting British interests – refugees –  
the Royal Navy organised for humanity

ON JULY 22ND, 1936, General Francisco Franco, the Governor of the Canary Islands, flew from Las Palmas to Spanish Morocco and raised his standard against the Republican Government of Spain.

At that moment there were few people outside Spain who would have predicted that this flight would lead to a prolonged civil war, a danger of general war in Europe, and a re-orientation of the policies of more than one of the Great Powers.

There was little enough in the way of portents to show that Spain was soon to be the battleground of crusading ideologies, the fortunes of which were to become the major concern of Governments remote from the Peninsula. Spain had been riven by revolution and counter-revolution before. It had passed with almost bewildering swiftness from monarchy, through military dictatorship and republicanism, to a form of government which, although it bore the labels of democracy and republicanism, approximated to a dictatorship of the Left.

It is said that evidence has been discovered that a Communist revolution had been planned in Spain, and that General Franco, by raising the standard of Spanish nationalism, anticipated such a revolution by a narrow margin.

Be that as it may, there had been in Spain frequent civil disturbances, political assassinations, and anti-religious demonstrations of a violent character. In 1934,



Spanish civil war –  
a young refugee



Spanish civil war –  
“the sailor is a handyman”



## PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

civil war had only been averted by methods of suppression so severe that the Government had lost much of the justification for its claim to being democratic, and the sympathy of a large proportion of the voters. As a result, the elections of February 1936 had proved inconclusive, no party gaining a clear working majority. In Spain such a state of affairs portends violence, liable at any moment to flare into revolution or civil war.

Early in July 1936 it became clear that Spain was on the brink of a revolution likely to lead to a long and bloody civil war.

This in itself was sufficient to engage the attention of the British Mediterranean Fleet. It is the business of the Royal Navy to protect British lives and British property and interests in whatsoever quarter of the globe they may be threatened. Civil war in Spain undoubtedly threatened British lives and property. There were in the Iberian Peninsula very large British interests and considerable "colonies" of British residents. A number of factories, utility companies, and industrial concerns were owned, and, in part, staffed, by British subjects. Moreover, during the summer months – at the time the civil war broke out – there were large numbers of British tourists and holiday-makers in Spain; particularly in Madrid, the towns on the north-east coast, and the Basque resorts.

There is in the Spaniard a streak of ruthless cruelty, and it was immediately obvious that the nature of the Spanish Civil War was such that not only the property, but also the lives, of foreigners would be in grave danger.

The British Navy has played its part around the coasts of Spain in a manner which has earned the praise and gratitude of most of the civilised world. It can hardly be said, however, that the need for its services was welcomed as a diversion from the normal routine. The Mediterranean Fleet had had a surfeit of "diversions"

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

during the preceding ten months, and wanted nothing so much as a reversion to "normal routine" and an opportunity for relaxation. The Mediterranean Fleet and its reinforcements from all over the world had spent nine months in the Eastern Mediterranean under conditions which curtailed leave and opportunities to "enjoy the blessings of the land."

About the end of June the great fleet concentration at Alexandria began to break up. It seemed that the Mediterranean was about to settle down to a period of peace after a time of frantic preparation for war. Promptly there were superimposed the troubles in Palestine. These, however, did not demand the presence of the whole of the Mediterranean Fleet. At the end of July 1936 the greater portion of the fleet was looking forward to a period of relaxation in Malta, to be followed by that pleasantest of "treats" for the Mediterranean Fleet, the Second Summer Cruise.

Pleasure and relaxation, however, had to go by the board. The units of the Mediterranean Fleet which were not busy with the troubles in Palestine were actually on passage from Alexandria to Malta when news of the outbreak of civil war in Spain was received. The First Destroyer Flotilla, which had started an adventurous commission at Hong Kong in April 1934, and which had already had its homecoming interrupted by months of emergency service in the Mediterranean, was then at Gibraltar on its way home to England. Once again its return home was postponed. The destroyers were ordered to remain in Spanish waters pending their relief by other units of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Units of the Mediterranean Fleet were at the same time ordered to proceed at high speed to Spanish ports, notably Barcelona, Valencia, and Palma (Majorca). Ships ordered to these ports had orders to evacuate all British subjects who were able to leave at such short notice, and to build up an organisation capable of dealing with the

## PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

evacuation of large numbers of refugees in case such a step became necessary.

The removal of refugees on a large scale soon proved necessary, and the efficient manner in which this was carried out was due to the planning and organisation worked out by the first ships to arrive in Spanish waters.

During the first phase of the Spanish Civil War the chief duty of the units of the Mediterranean Fleet in Spanish waters was the removal of refugees to places of safety. The magnitude of the task is shown by the fact that during the first three months of the war thirty-one British warships were engaged. These ships steamed a total distance of more than ninety-seven thousand miles in three months – a distance approximately equal to four voyages round the world. In the three months from the middle of July to the middle of October, British warships carried to safety more than six thousand refugees. These were of all ages, and of a great variety of nationalities – less than two thousand of them were British subjects.

The British Navy was not, of course, the only force at work around the Spanish coasts. French, German, Italian, and United States warships very soon arrived to look after their own nationals, and the different navies co-operated closely in the interests of humanity. This was true also of the Italian warships. The tension of past months was forgotten in the common emergency.

There were thousands of foreigners in Spain, however, who belonged to nations unable to send warships to protect or evacuate their nationals. As is always the case, the British Navy took care of these also, and evacuated them willingly. The only stipulation was that their evacuation had to be recommended by the local British Consul. Thus it was that, among the six thousand refugees taken to safety in British warships during the first three months of the Spanish Civil War, there were representatives of no less than fifty-five nationalities.

There were in Spain large numbers of Spanish subjects



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

who were anxious to leave their unhappy country when civil war created a reign of terror. British naval officers would gladly have taken charge of these also – particularly since many of them were women and children who were destitute and in actual danger – but this could not normally be done unless the permission of the Spanish authorities had been obtained. This rule was, however, waived in cases in which the inevitable delay of conforming with the formalities would have condemned innocent people to certain death.

Permission to evacuate Spanish subjects was not always easily obtained. Particularly was this true of nuns, since the anti-religious movements of the Anarchists and Syndicalists became extremely ferocious. A large number of nuns were, however, taken to safety in British warships.

Thanks to forethought and good organisation, a system for dealing with the constant and increasing flow of refugees was perfected and consolidated within a very few days of the beginning of the outbreak. Cruisers of the County class (which have large deck spaces), and the fleet repair ships H.M.S. *Woolwich* and H.M.S. *Resource* (which have large working-spaces between decks), were used as depot ships and “refugee clearing stations” at the chief ports. Refugees who arrived at these ports from inland were accommodated on board one of these ships on their arrival. Usually they stayed on board one night.

Every day destroyers went up and down the coast collecting refugees from the smaller ports. These were brought to the main “refugee clearing station” for the area, where they joined the refugees from the interior on board one of the depot ships. Very early next morning the refugees collected on the previous day were moved from the depot ship to one or more destroyers. These left at once, and steamed to Marseilles at high speed.

High speed was always necessary for these destroyers of the “refugee ferry service”; and frequently they had to leave the clearance port before daybreak. It was

## PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

essential, owing to the lack of accommodation for refugees on board a destroyer, that the voyage to Marseilles should be done during the day. Moreover, the saving of time was necessary in order that the "ferry" destroyers should arrive at Marseilles before the customs closed.

On two occasions during the early days of the evacuation large ships had to be used in order that a greater number of refugees than could be dealt with by destroyers should be taken to safety. The large cruiser H.M.S. *Devonshire* made one voyage from Barcelona to Marseilles in which she carried over five hundred refugees. The refugees did not have a very pleasant voyage, for they passed through one of the worst storms of the Gulf of Lions; but they may have found cold comfort in the realisation that matters would have been infinitely worse if they had been in destroyers. The battle cruiser H.M.S. *Repulse* took over five hundred refugees to Marseilles from Palma, Majorca, where there was a large British "colony."

This latter voyage was unique in that it was the only occasion on the east side of the Peninsula in which refugees were evacuated from territory owing allegiance to General Franco.

Palma had been bombed from the air every day for a week, and, although these raids were small affairs which excited more amused interest than alarm, the British and German Consuls agreed on July 29th that it would be wise to place all their nationals in a place of safety as soon as might be. This decision was prompted by knowledge that more energetic and extensive air raids were contemplated. The embarkation of British and German refugees in H.M.S. *Repulse* began at ten o'clock on the morning of July 30th. By five o'clock in the afternoon all the refugees, numbering more than five hundred, were on board, and H.M.S. *Repulse* was ready to sail for Marseilles.

As though to emphasise the security provided by the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

British Navy, Palma was subjected to the worst air raid it had experienced, just after the last of the refugees had embarked in H.M.S. *Repulse* and before she had weighed anchor. The precautions taken by the naval authorities, in conjunction with the British and German Consuls, were proved fully justified.

The weather was bad throughout the night of the passage from Majorca to Marseilles, but the refugees suffered no undue discomfort. In a ship of the size of H.M.S. *Repulse* it was found possible to accommodate all refugees below decks. The captain's cabin, the officers' cabins, the wardroom, the gunroom, the schoolroom, and the "flats" adjoining, were given over to the accommodation of the refugees. Even the chapel was used.

The baggage of the refugees was limited to three suitcases for each person. For the most part the refugees accepted this baggage restriction and loyally abided by it, but there were cases in which the term "suitcase" was stretched to well-nigh unbelievable proportions. The tact of the "Embarkation Officer" was taxed to its utmost by one refugee, who was surprised and grieved to be told that he could not take his motor-car on board instead of a suitcase.

The passenger list of H.M.S. *Repulse* on this occasion included twelve dogs. These were housed in one of the aircraft hangars (H.M.S. *Repulse* had recently been reconstructed and was fitted with an aircraft launching catapult and a hangar for the stowage of seaplanes). The dogs were in charge of an able seaman, who became slightly bewildered at their undisciplined failure to understand his well-embroidered instructions to be friendly and silent. Few of the people in the vicinity of the hangar got any sleep that night.

Next morning, however, was fine and sunny, with the sea moderating with the rapidity characteristic of the Gulf of Lions. A good hot breakfast to the strains of a radio-gramophone helped the refugees to forget the

## PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

discomforts of a rough night at sea in a battle cruiser.

Except for a few instances, in which several hundred refugees were removed at one time in one of the larger ships, it was unnecessary, once the refugee organisation got into its stride, for refugees to spend a night in the cramped quarters which were all that a destroyer could offer.

It was found that in calm weather a destroyer could carry as many as a hundred and fifty refugees during the daytime without serious overcrowding. In fine weather a destroyer is by no means an uncomfortable ship, although the close proximity to the sea and the polished steel decks are not calculated to engender confidence in a landsman. It is true that there is not much deck space, but what there is proves dry and fairly sheltered in a calm sea. Moreover, the seamen of the "ferry" destroyers worked wonders in producing small comforts for the refugees under their care. Canvas screens were rigged up as a protection against spray, and small impromptu hammocks were slung between the torpedo-tubes and in other corners for the accommodation of seasick children.

As an example of the work done by the destroyers one may quote the record of one ship. During August she made five "collecting" trips up and down the coast and six trips to Gibraltar or Marseilles "ferrying" the refugees from the depot ships to safety. In that period this particular destroyer carried three hundred and eleven refugees, of whom forty-one were British subjects. The total mileage steamed was 3,798 sea miles, involving a fuel consumption which, worked out on the basis of the cost of transporting refugees, amounted to about £4 per refugee. This, of course, was exclusive of meals.

At Barcelona a large cruiser of the County class was moored alongside the mole so that refugees could walk straight on board after they had passed the customs and the local embarkation authorities. For most of the period

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

during which refugees were being evacuated in large numbers this cruiser was H.M.S. *Devonshire*.

As the refugees arrived on board, their passports were examined and they were given a ticket explaining to them where their accommodation was to be found. Such baggage as they possessed was labelled and put in charge of a baggage officer, and seamen guides showed them where they were to eat and sleep. As a rule the refugees arrived on board the cruiser in the late afternoon or evening, and left again for passage to safety in destroyers at five o'clock the next morning. They thus had two meals on board the cruiser – supper and a hot but early breakfast.

At Valencia it was impossible for the depot ship to moor alongside, and all refugees and their baggage had to be brought off from the shore in boats. This added greatly to the work, particularly as many of the refugees were old and infirm. Very often there was a heavy swell running into Valencia roads which made boat-work exceedingly difficult. "Cradles" were built so that elderly refugees and invalids could be hoisted on board by a derrick when conditions were bad.

It was inevitable that refugees should undergo a certain amount of discomfort, for a warship is not designed to accommodate or carry large numbers of passengers, while in many cases the evacuations took place in bad weather. Everything possible was done for their comfort, however. Officers gave up their cabins and their wardrooms. Ships' companies gave up their recreation spaces, their canteen, and large portions of their mess-decks. Both officers and men went out of their way to anticipate every need and to alleviate suffering so far as this was possible. Men who had just come off watch cheerfully gave up the few hours of rest that were due to them in order to wait upon the refugees, tucking blankets round the elderly and invalid, cheering the grief-stricken, looking after and entertaining the children.

In every British warship employed off the Spanish coasts

## PASSPORTS FROM SPAIN

officers and men went far beyond that which they were called upon to do, and went out of their way at all times to make easier the lot of these unhappy people. One lady, on disembarking from a "ferry" destroyer at Marseilles, was so moved by the manner of her treatment that she burst out: "These men are not sailors; they are angels."

In practically every case, the refugees showed deep gratitude to the British Navy. Many of them had lost everything they possessed. Many had seen friends and relations killed or led away to certain death at the hands of the "killing squads." All had been going in terror of their lives. The security of the White Ensign offered a contrast too deep for words.

The officers and men of the Royal Navy, for their part, did not feel that it was much for them to forgo once again their long-expected leave, and to share what they could of their comforts on board with these tragic people who were escaping from horrible deaths. Most of them saw enough of the Civil War to appreciate the horrors of that conflict. They watched the bombing of Malaga. They saw the street barricades, the burnt churches, the collapse of all control, the indiscriminate looting, the wanton destruction, and the terrible ferocity of the civil strife. They saw the prison ships in the harbour at Barcelona and the barracks overlooking the town. Evening after evening they saw crowded cars driven up the hill to the barracks, and heard the shots which followed the swift and summary "trial" of the victims.

A ship which worked independently was the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Maine*, the hospital ship of the Mediterranean Fleet. On August 2nd she arrived at Valencia from Malta. Because of her large wards and many cabins she was admirably fitted both for receiving refugees and for transporting them.

The chief task of the *Maine* was the evacuation of the large numbers of refugees who came to Valencia from

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Madrid. She made three return voyages to Marseilles, calling on each occasion at Barcelona, and paying one visit to Alicante. In thirty-five days this ship steamed 3,362 miles, and carried to safety 1,109 refugees belonging to thirty-five different nationalities.

The passage from Valencia to Marseilles in this ship took four days, including the call at Barcelona, so that there was time for her passengers to settle down. Among them there were many children, for whose benefit a number of cots and tin baths, and large quantities of sweets and toys, had been taken on board before the ship left Malta.

The use of a hospital ship for the transportation of refugees aroused much interest among the "passengers," and one lady asked how many ships there were in the "Red Cross Line." The *Maine* happens to be the only hospital ship attached to the Royal Navy.

During the passages of this ship to Marseilles a regular routine of meals was drawn up, and, in spite of the large numbers and the limited accommodation for meals, families and friends were, as far as possible, seated together. A quantity of cigarettes were made on board from the tobacco of the Service issue, and these were distributed among those refugees who had no money. In the evenings at sea there were impromptu entertainments and concerts in which the refugees and the ship's company combined. Such entertainments certainly did much to encourage the refugees, and take their minds off their plight and the horrors from which they had just escaped.

In handling people of so many different nationalities the language question was often acute, and on some occasions led to misunderstandings, in spite of the British sailor's *flair* for making himself understood in any language under the sun. A classic instance of this was provided by an officer in one of the destroyers who volunteered to carry an infant down a steep steel ladder while its parents, who knew no English, waited at the

bottom. As the officer started to descend the ladder the baby in his arms began to scream loudly. Its temporary "nurse" was heard to ejaculate, "If you don't stop that — noise I'll wring your — neck!" The child, appreciating the situation with a discretion beyond its years, was frozen into a horrified silence. At the foot of the ladder the officer was profusely thanked by the child's mother, who complimented him on his charming and soothing way with children.

In many cases refugees rendered valuable assistance by serving as voluntary interpreters. On one voyage of the *Maine* there were two brothers of Dutch nationality who were remarkable linguists. Not only did they serve as very efficient interpreters; they collected a sum of £17 for the Red Cross Society — an amazing offering from a community many of whom had just lost practically all they had in the world — and they drew up a manifesto expressing thanks to the British Government and to all officers, nurses, and men of the ship. This was signed by every refugee on board old enough to write.



## CHAPTER XIX

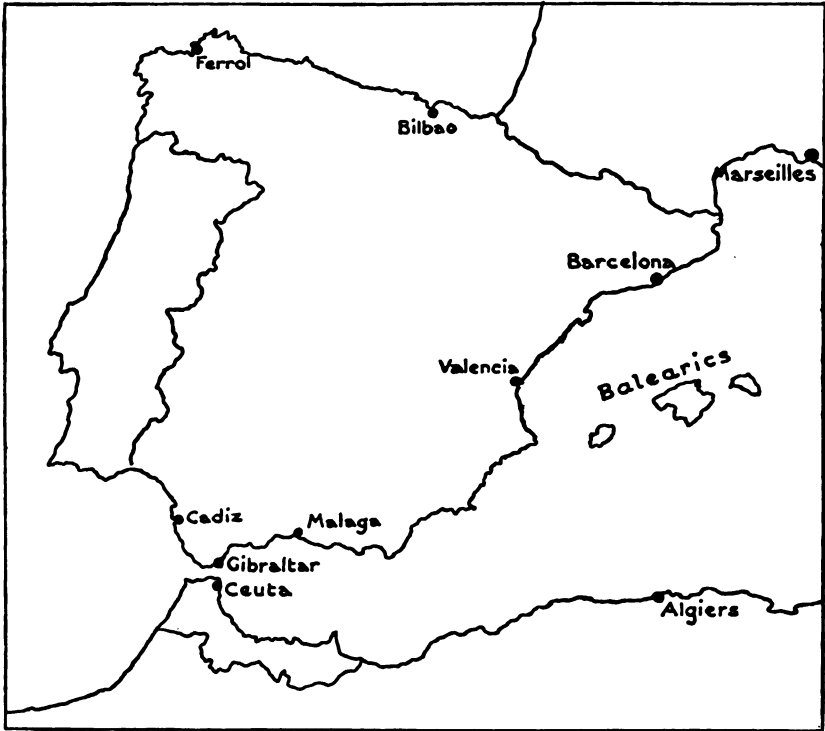
### NAVAL PIMPERNELS

Relations with Spanish authorities - smuggling of lives and jewels -  
meeting with Spanish republican navy - minefields in the north -  
exchanging hostages

THE RELATIONS OF THE BRITISH NAVY with the Spanish authorities were limited, as a rule, to the formalities connected with the embarkation of refugees. These, however, were usually lengthy and complicated. At Barcelona and Valencia naval officers acted as liaison officers with the civil authorities. These officers lived ashore. The naval liaison officer at Valencia met the trains which arrived twice daily from Madrid. As a rule each train carried about thirty refugees. The naval liaison officer took charge of these at the station, dealt with their luggage, and arranged for transport from the railway station to the port.

The task of this officer was a heavy one, and it is doubtful whether it would have been possible had it not been for the friendly sympathy of the two Civil Governors who held office during the period when the embarkation of refugees was the primary consideration of the Royal Navy. The first of these was a journalist by profession, who had been thrust - apparently rather unwillingly - into a position of executive authority by the political upheaval which heralded the Civil War. This man had no organising ability at all, but he was animated by a strong desire to deal fairly with all who came his way. By the standards existing in republican Spain he was definitely a moderate. Between him and the Royal Naval

MAP 4





## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

liaison officer there grew up something akin to warm friendship. The Civil Governor afforded every possible facility to the British officer, and on more than one occasion went to lengths in this direction which jeopardised both his position and his personal safety.

Apparently the moderation and tolerance of this man did not suit the Anarchist and Syndicalist factions who were in virtual control in the district. He was last seen early one morning boarding a commandeered train, his retreat covered by a group of gunmen. But, hasty as was his retreat from office, he found time at the station to bid a cordial farewell to the British naval officer with whom he had had so many friendly dealings.

His successor was a man of very different character. He was an ex-colonel of the Spanish Army, and something of a fire-eating martinet. He certainly had ability, and even in those chaotic days he very quickly reduced the Governor's office to some semblance of order.

Civil Governors were always treated with respect by the Royal Navy. They were, in spite of turmoil and revolution, the accredited representatives of a nominally friendly Government—at least, they purported to be. As such they were entertained on board British warships and accorded the honours due to their station. It is, however, to be feared that the compliments and honours were the more readily accorded, and were sometimes exaggerated, in order to keep on the right side of a man whose goodwill meant life and escape to so many unfortunates.

The ex-colonel Civil Governor was duly invited to lunch on board a British cruiser soon after he had assumed office. On his arrival he was met by a guard of honour of Royal Marines. Everyone knows that there are no men in the world who can compare with "His Majesty's Jollies" for smartness when they are on their mettle. Imagine, then, the consternation, the facial struggles, on the British quarterdeck, when the fiery

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

Spaniard, having carefully inspected the guard of honour, remarked politely that it was quite as smart as his troops ashore – which consisted of armed gangs of ragged civilians! It was a situation which would have brought joy to the genius of Mr. H. M. Bateman.

At Barcelona a car was placed at the disposal of the commanding officer of the British cruiser which lay alongside the mole. This car had a chauffeur. What his real name was nobody ever discovered, for he was invariably alluded to as “Joe” by the naval personnel. “Joe” was a character, and one who took an immense pride in his office. Exceedingly small, but apparently possessed of immense physical strength – and courage – his uniform consisted of blue overalls with a red armband and a belt carrying a holster with a very large revolver, a weapon of which he was inordinately proud. If ever he and his car were held up by the militia at one of the many barricades which were strung across the streets, “Joe” used to fly into a very passion of righteous indignation. That any guard should try to hold up a British naval officer seemed to him the deadliest of sins. Many were the unfortunate sentries who gave ground in something approaching panic at the flood of “Joe’s” invective and the brandishing of his enormous revolver.

“Joe” was once entertained on board the British cruiser, where he was the guest of the petty officers’ mess. He proved immensely popular. His seventh heaven of delight was reached, however, when, on one occasion, he was allowed to drive the fast motor-boat belonging to the ship. A very devil for speed on land, speed on the water sent him into transports of delight.

It says much for the tact of the British naval officers and of the British Consuls ashore that relations with the Spanish authorities ashore remained good. A “Scarlet Pimpernel” is apt to be misunderstood and resented by those from whose clutches he is helping people to escape. Although, on the whole, the regulations of the Spanish

## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

authorities were faithfully adhered to by the naval personnel, there were occasions when the demands of common humanity were more insistent than any orders or decrees.

Many who could not get passports had to smuggle themselves on board a British warship – or be shot. Nuns often had to be taken on board in defiance of the threats of wildly anti-religious mobs, usually composed largely of armed women and children. One night a Spanish policeman came on board H.M.S. *London* at Barcelona. He was promptly disarmed by naval ratings, and it was then discovered that he wore civilian clothes under his uniform. He was a Spanish nobleman who had heard that he was to be shot and had bought the policeman's uniform in which to escape. Another nobleman swam to a British cruiser in his clothes during the night. When H.M.S. *London* left Barcelona a pilot came on board, although no pilot had been asked for. He really was a pilot, but he was escaping almost certain death. His brother had already been arrested, and in Barcelona at that time an arrest was almost synonymous with an execution.

Plans for escape through the net of the Spanish authorities did not always come off. At Valencia two young Spaniards went bathing day after day with a small surf-boat. They planned to allay suspicion by the regularity of their habits and then to escape to a British destroyer in the roadstead. They failed. The night before they were to make their attempt to escape they were arrested and shot.

Some of the refugees tried to smuggle their jewels out of Spain to the British warships, and it must be recorded that these attempts were often regarded with understanding and sympathy by the personnel of the Royal Navy. Such people were almost invariably of the nobility – people who had always been accustomed to the best of everything. They had already lost practically everything

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

to the factions in the Spanish upheaval. It seemed hard that they should be prevented from saving a few valuables with which to eke out the penury and misery of exile.

The search in the customs sheds before the refugees were allowed to board the British warships was extremely thorough. No valuables whatever were allowed to leave the country, and particularly not money. Many refugees were stripped to the skin when they were searched. Nevertheless, some managed, often with the help of a sympathetic sailor, to take jewels on board the warships and so out of the country. One woman, as she went into the customs shed to be searched, hastily thrust a diamond necklace into the pocket of a British naval officer. The largest stone in that necklace was the size of one of the old threepenny pieces.

The smuggling of jewels and other valuables was, however, indulged in by very few. The vast majority of the refugees escaped with nothing but a few small personal effects. A great many got away with literally nothing but the clothes they were wearing – and were fortunate to escape with their lives.

Particularly was this true when the reign of terror ashore grew worse – when the towns were being preyed upon by armed gangs of Anarchists and Syndicalists whose political faiths seemed to go no further than looting, rapine, and murder. Even the inmates of the prisons and of the lunatic asylums were let loose upon the streets and became possessed of arms.

Although relations between the Royal Navy and the Spanish authorities in the important towns, where cruisers or other large ships were moored as “refugee clearing stations,” were uniformly good, the destroyers which went up and down the coast collecting refugees from the smaller ports often encountered great difficulties. In the first place, it was often difficult to discover who was the proper authority to whom to apply for permission to remove refugees. The relative power of the various

## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

factions was continually changing. Often authority was vested simply in the possession of a sub-machine gun. Seldom was there any responsibility to a higher and central authority. More often than not the possession of a sub-machine gun betokened not only local authority, but a truculent suspicion which, on some occasions, led to the refusal of permission to embark even refugees of British nationality.

On such occasions the tact and initiative of the British destroyer captains had to be relied upon. These performed their difficult tasks with conspicuous success, apparently not at all daunted by the fact that the prospect of playing a leading part in a first-class international incident was always before them. As a rule polite insistence was enough, although sometimes this had to be coupled with seemingly absent-minded allusions to the power of a destroyer's guns. Bribery played its part. On one occasion two bottles of whiskey bought life and escape for a dozen refugees. Sometimes sterner methods had to be employed. On one occasion a destroyer cleared for action and trained its guns on the local Government building before the president of the local Anarchist Association could be persuaded to allow refugees to be embarked.

It was not often that the British Navy came into contact with the naval forces of republican Spain. The ships of these forces were for the most part commanded by men who, up to a few weeks before, had been junior or petty officers. When the Civil War had broken out the crews of most of the ships of the Spanish Navy had mutinied, and their officers had either been sent to the prison ships or murdered and thrown overboard.

One of the occasions on which the two navies came into contact was when two British destroyers went to Iviza, one of the islands of the Balearic group, to evacuate foreigners. They found two Spanish Government destroyers carrying out a leisurely bombardment of the



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

town. A British officer went over to one of the Spanish warships to request them to cease fire while foreigners were evacuated. He found that the Spanish destroyer was commanded by a petty officer. This worthy, anxious to be courteous, led the British officer to the wardroom, in which there were several flashy women of obvious profession.

Naturally a navy run on such lines after bloody mutiny did not appeal either to the officers or men of the Royal Navy. Prejudice, however, was never allowed to show itself. It has been persistently rumoured that relations between the officers and men of the Royal Navy suffered as a result of close contact with the Spanish Civil War. It is averred that this was because the sympathies of the officers were with General Franco, while those of the men were with the Spanish Government, on the side of which some of their erstwhile messmates, who had been discharged from the Royal Navy after the Invergordon Mutiny, were actually fighting.

Such statements are without any vestige of truth. The work of the Royal Navy during the Spanish Civil War had the opposite effect. It improved the relations and understanding between officers and men, as always happens when all work together under circumstances involving hardship and danger.

There was both hardship and danger for the Royal Navy around the coasts of Spain. The discomfort and strain were very real. Owing to the impossibility of ships lying alongside anywhere but at Barcelona, the ships were perpetually exposed to the heavy swell which is one of the features of the western Mediterranean. Fuelling often had to be carried out at sea, an operation of great difficulty in anything but a flat calm. There were constant alarms and excursions. An uninterrupted night's rest was very much the exception, and there was plenty of high-speed steaming in bad weather. The ships and their men were constantly in danger from bombs, bombardments, and

## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

the stray bullets of inconsequent snipers. They were always at a moment's notice to shift berth in order to safeguard the ships from being in a possible line of fire. Recreation and shore leave were out of the question. In several cases the officers and men of a ship spent five weeks at a time in the cramped quarters on board under these trying conditions without ever setting foot on dry land. Yet there was no grumbling. The ships continued on their errands of mercy, and the officers and men waited hopefully for the relaxation and leave of which they had been so long cheated by circumstances. And in the meantime they performed services to humanity which will not soon be forgotten.

Certainly they are not likely to be forgotten by the youngest refugee evacuated from unhappy Spain. This was a baby boy, only fifteen days old. He had not been baptised when he and his mother were taken from Barcelona to Marseilles in the flotilla leader H.M.S. *Douglas*, but in memory of that exciting episode of his earliest days he has since been christened "Douglas."

The diversity of the refugees evacuated from Spain by the Royal Navy was extraordinary. They were of almost every known race and of every age, from young "Douglas" to a nun of ninety-six, and the range of their occupations was amazing. A number were nuns, turned out of their convents and their country simply because they represented religion in a community which had suddenly turned violently against all religion. Most of the nuns took away nothing but the habits which they wore, and some had been forced to give up even their rosaries and their crucifixes.

A party of these were being transported in a British destroyer - H.M.S. *Anthony* - when an Irish sailor noticed their plight. He spent the whole trip making them rosaries out of cod-line, with properly spaced knots to serve as beads. The gratitude of the nuns for this attention was pathetic to see. When they left the British

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

warships their thanks were simple but sincere. They invariably promised to pray for their rescuers. Their chief worry seemed to be, not the prospect of landing in a strange country without money or effects, but that they had nothing more tangible to present to the officers and men who had carried them to safety. That they had been rescued from certain death was only too clear in the majority of cases, the Royal Navy having on several occasions considerable difficulty in evacuating them in face of the opposition of the armed rabble, even after official permission for their removal had been obtained.

Among the less usual occupations of the world, representatives of which were guests of the British Navy during these months, was that of the professor whose visiting-card bore the inspiring title "Biosiphist-Biotherapist." One refugee was the owner of a travelling circus. He was heart-broken when he was told that he could not take his favourite camel on board a destroyer. Another was the pilot of an aeroplane which he had delivered to the Spanish Government in the early days of the Civil War. This worthy found the prospects of war flying at the front rather more than he had bargained for. He flew his aeroplane to the coast and crashed it a few miles from one of the ports where a British warship was waiting. Breathless, shaken, and rather frightened, he arrived at the British Consulate and was taken on board a British warship. He had good reason to be frightened. Within a few hours it became known that an Anarchist killing squad was asking awkward questions about him.

One of the British destroyers carried at the same time a complete troupe of dancing girls and an American "all-in" wrestler. The latter was an enormous man, who seemed almost ashamed of having to flee from a mere revolution. However, he justified himself on his arrival on board the destroyer by the profound remark, "Say, you can't wrestle bullets."

To the troupe of dancing girls somebody in the British

Spanish civil war – refugees on board a British destroyer



Spanish civil war – naval boats embarking refugees



## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

Admiralty owes an apology. The British warships reported to the Admiralty at frequent intervals the details of the progress of the evacuation from Spain. These reports were made by wireless in code – groups of letters or figures unintelligible to any casual person who happened to be listening in. Often some of the code groups became distorted owing to interference in the ether or some other cause, and it is one of the first laws of decoding never to guess at the meaning of a distorted or incomplete group, but always to confess it in the decoded version of the signal. Thus the decoded signal which was passed to the departments concerned in the Admiralty read: “Have evacuated . . . . dancing girls (corrupt group) . . .”

It was, perhaps, with the children that the British sailors excelled themselves. Many a miserable and seasick mother had cause for amazed gratitude at the way in which her offspring were looked after by the amateur nurses in blue serge. Wood and canvas cots were rigged up in the most unlikely places, and toys were improvised from wood and rope. Weird and wonderful “merry-go-rounds” were rigged on capstans, with the capstan bars fitted and hammocks slung between them. It was a common sight to see sailors and children on hands and knees, earnestly playing trains under the tail of a gun turret or practising the art of house-building with wooden bricks made in the carpenter’s shop on board. In the wardroom of one destroyer a small boy learnt the mysteries of throwing poker-dice, and became so adept that he won “hands down” from the officers – much to their delight.

Sometimes the evacuation of refugees resembled nothing so much as a children’s party. A destroyer had on one occasion to spend a day at Iviza before proceeding to the “refugee clearing station” at Valencia. There were a lot of children on board, and the problem of what to do with them became acute. There is little enough space

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in a destroyer for children to career about, even if the destroyer is not packed with refugees. This ship was, and more were expected at any moment, so that tea had to be prepared for nearly 150 people apart from the crew. Something had to be done to get the children out of the way of the crew, and of their harassed parents, many of whom had lost home, money, belongings, and even husbands.

Someone had a brilliant idea. It was a fine day. Why not a picnic? The local authorities gave permission to land on a secluded sandy beach. The destroyer's whaler and motor-boat duly left the ship, provisioned with biscuits, sandwiches, condensed milk, and lemonade, and loaded to the gunwales with shouting children of all ages, shapes, and sizes. These were carefully counted as they got into the boats, for the authorities ashore were insistent that every precaution should be taken to see that everybody who landed was again embarked. Moreover, nobody wanted to have to face some tragic refugee and confess that her child had somehow been mislaid.

Ashore the children had the time of their lives. There was bathing, and all the wonderful games which can be played with sand and seaweed. A small international seaweed war broke out which was only called off by the announcement that food was ready. It was all a great success; but there were anxious moments for the officer in charge when the time came to go back to the ship. Heads were counted with difficulty, since the children absolutely refused to keep still. Three times were the children counted, each time with a growing anxiety on the part of the officer. First there were two too few. Then there was one too many. In the end it was found that the second count was right. There really was one too many. A small local inhabitant had seen a party going on which was too good to miss, and he had "gate-crashed" it very successfully!

The Navy's dealings with children were not always of

## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

the lighter variety. There were cases in which sailors looked after small children under horrible conditions. One such case was a passage made by the destroyer H.M.S. *Anthony* to Marseilles. A very heavy gale was blowing, and all refugees had to be below for fear of being washed overboard. In the wardroom they were packed on the deck head to toe, like so many sardines in a tin. A destroyer in bad weather is, to say the least, lively, and H.M.S. *Anthony* was rolling forty-five degrees. The sea was so bad that one of the boats at the davit-heads was smashed to matchwood and carried away. Below, officers and men who had difficulty in keeping their feet on the reeling decks had to deal with cases of hysterical terror among the refugees. The crash of crockery from a pantry or the vicious hiss and shudder as a wave hit the ship's side and went creaming across the decks sent many of the poor passengers, whose nerves were already stretched to the limit, into paroxysms of terror. Among the refugees were two small babies. These would certainly have been seriously hurt, if not killed, had they not been held. Their mothers were quite incapable of holding them. Two seamen spent the entire passage nursing these babies, ministering to them every now and then with condensed milk from soda-water bottles fitted with the rubber ends of fountain-pen fillers.

Under all reasonable conditions the refugees tried to give as little trouble as possible. Very few complained of the food or the accommodation provided, although there were one or two demands for "first-class cabins." Where trouble was caused, it was almost invariably due to lack of appreciation of the difficulties being faced by the British warships or to constitutional incapability of obeying instructions. Among the latter must be classed the good lady who left her suitcase in the train and her passport on an hotel table, sent her other luggage to the wrong part of the harbour, and finally failed to arrive



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

herself as she had been seized with a desire to go sight-seeing in the town. A naval officer spent nearly a whole day running round after her and her belongings, and her final evacuation was a relief to the whole ship.

Although the major part of the work of evacuating refugees was carried out on the east coast of Spain, British destroyers were also busy along the Bay of Biscay shore.

This coast was dealt with during the first months of the Civil War by four destroyers of the Second Destroyer Flotilla, detached from the Home Fleet for the purpose. The evacuation of refugees from this part of Spain was, in the early days, done chiefly by land. Early in September, however, Irun fell into the hands of General Franco, and thereafter all evacuations from Basque territory had to be carried out by sea.

On September 10th, 1936, the destroyers of the Second Flotilla were relieved on the north coast of Spain by four ships of the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, also from the Home Fleet. These were H.M.S. *Exmouth*, H.M.S. *Electra*, H.M.S. *Esk*, and H.M.S. *Escort*.

The evacuation of refugees from the Basque coast, extending from east of San Sebastian to west of Gijon, was assisted by a German cruiser, two German destroyers, an American destroyer, and a French sloop.

The difficulties of the evacuation were great, since General Franco had declared his intention of laying minefields in the approaches to the ports. It was not long before it was discovered that this was no idle threat. One of the British destroyers found a floating mine which had broken away from its moorings, and the Bilbao authorities lost two or three minesweepers in their attempts to clear the minefields.

The danger to British warships from the minefields was reduced to a minimum by the destroyers remaining outside the three-mile limit, and maintaining contact with the shore and embarking refugees in boats. In fine

## NAVAL PIMPERNELS

weather this system proved successful, although it added considerably to the work involved. Providentially, however, refugees were not forthcoming in the north in anything approaching the numbers which had to be dealt with on the east coast. In the two months that these ships spent on the north coast of Spain about 400 refugees were carried by them to St. Jean de Luz and other French ports. These included 67 British subjects, 84 French, 16 Belgian, 6 Norwegian, 16 Mexican, 5 German, 14 American, 89 Argentine, 6 Austrian, 22 Swiss, 34 Cuban, 5 Czecho-Slovak, 9 Chilean, 12 Italian, 2 Swedish, and 2 Peruvian.

H.M.S. *Exmouth*, H.M.S. *Esk*, and H.M.S. *Escort* were also concerned in effecting the exchange of hostages.

Both sides in the Spanish Civil War held numbers of political prisoners as hostages. Many of these were women and children, and attempts were made by various persons to arrange for their exchange on humanitarian grounds. Finally Dr. Junod, a Swiss acting on behalf of the International Red Cross, prevailed upon the rival factions to consent to the exchange of women and children hostages. The exchange of these hostages was effected by their transport in the three British destroyers, which carried more than a thousand hostages back to their own people.

The four destroyers of the Fifth Flotilla were relieved after two months of arduous service off the north coast of Spain. During these two months they made thirty voyages, carrying refugees and hostages, and steamed a total distance of about 13,000 miles.

## CHAPTER XX

### FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

Working for the safety of shipping – irresponsible bombing – a battle cruiser goes to the assistance of a small steamer – a queer ultimatum – the Spanish contestants start to use sea power – British naval officers wounded by a Spanish shell – sinking of the *España* – a wild-goose chase – action of H.M.S. *Blanche*

THE WORK OF THE BRITISH NAVY in connection with the Spanish Civil War very soon came to be concerned with other matters besides the rescue and transportation of refugees. The safety of British shipping on the high seas upon its lawful occasions is always one of the first duties of the Royal Navy, and the safety of merchant ships was very soon threatened.

In the early part of the Civil War there was little attempt by either side to exercise any degree of sea power. While more than half of the Spanish Navy had been at Cartagena when the revolution broke out, and therefore owed allegiance to the Spanish Government, the great naval arsenal of Ferrol fell almost immediately into the hands of General Franco, thus providing him with two modern and powerful cruisers as well as other craft.

It was probably on account of shortage of trained personnel, coupled with the fact that the ships were not ready for sea, which prevented General Franco from trying to exercise any degree of sea power in the early stages of the war. In spite of the fact that the cause of General Franco depended almost entirely upon the transport of troops and materials to Spain from Morocco, such command of the sea as could be claimed by either side in the neighbourhood of the Straits of Gibraltar

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

belonged, without challenge, to the Government. Madrid had submarines and destroyers to patrol these waters, and light cruisers and an old battleship to support the patrols. Something in the way of a patrol system was established, but it certainly showed no signs of efficiency. Rather did it appear that the Spanish Government forces were content to rely on occasional short "sweeps" in the eastern approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar.

Nevertheless, the Spanish Government warships, and particularly the submarines, provided a threat to sea transport which General Franco did not seem disposed to ignore. Throughout the first phase of the Civil War—that is, until General Franco began to exercise sea power in October 1936—the transport of his troops from Morocco to Spain was carried out almost entirely by air.

Air activity was also extensive on the part of the Government forces, and each side seemed to think that any ship which floated in those waters necessarily belonged to its rival. In these circumstances, instances of bombs being aimed by aircraft at neutral ships multiplied rapidly, and the lodging of official protests appeared to do little more than evoke polite expressions of regret at a mistake in identity.

Actually there was seldom any attempt on the part of aircraft to identify a ship before dropping bombs, and most of the attacks were made by aircraft flying at a great height. Whether this was due to fear of anti-aircraft guns or to high ideological thinking, it had one important effect so far as shipping was concerned—in the early days the bombs never hit a ship. Nevertheless, these attacks on shipping could not be allowed to continue, and it was the business of the Royal Navy to give to British ships passing through the danger area the protection which is their due.

British destroyer patrols were therefore instituted in the eastern approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar, and arrangements were made for escorts to be provided for

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

British merchant ships in cases where this was thought to be desirable. These steps, of course, imposed even more work upon the destroyers at Gibraltar, most of which were supposed to be "resting" for a short time after trying weeks on the "refugee coast."

On more than one occasion bombs were dropped fairly close to a British destroyer, and there were several instances of destroyers opening fire with anti-aircraft guns in order to drive off bombing aircraft. In spite of everything, however, sporadic and irresponsible bombing of ships continued.

The excuse of "mistaken identity" reached the height of farce when it was applied to a British battleship. On February 4th, 1937, H.M.S. *Royal Oak* was bombed. The battleship was at the time close to Europa Point, the southern end of the Rock of Gibraltar. The bombing was carried out by three aircraft, flying very high. The nearest bomb struck the water three cables – 600 yards – from H.M.S. *Royal Oak*, so it could hardly be said that the battleship was ever in serious danger.

In this case it was established that the bombers belonged to the Spanish Government. Most of the irresponsible bombing which went on, however, was carried out by machines owing allegiance to General Franco.

In addition to the air activity of the rival factions in Spain, there was a certain amount of direct naval action even in the early days of the Civil War. On August 9th, 1936, an Englishman, Captain Rupert Savile, was killed when his yacht, *Blue Shadow*, was shelled by the Franco cruiser *Almirante Cervera* off Gijon. The *Almirante Cervera* was, apparently, the only considerable warship ready for sea which supported General Franco, and her activities were at that time confined to marauding expeditions along the Basque coast. The tragedy of Captain Savile was closed by apology and the acceptance of the explanation that the light was poor and the movements of the yacht seemed suspicious.

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

A fortnight later direct naval action by a Spanish warship in the Mediterranean drew the limelight upon naval activity off the south-east coast of Spain.

The Bland Line steamer *Gibel Zerjon*, a small vessel which plies between Gibraltar and North African ports, was held up and searched by the Spanish Government cruiser *Miguel de Cervantes*. The *Gibel Zerjon* had then been forbidden by the Spaniards to enter Melilla (her destination in Spanish Morocco), and ordered to return at once to Gibraltar. Here was a case of gratuitous interference with British shipping. Immediate and strong action was obviously necessary, as otherwise similar cases would be almost certain to follow.

The stopping and searching of the *Gibel Zerjon* happened on the afternoon of August 23rd, 1936 – a Sunday. At Gibraltar lay the battle cruiser H.M.S. *Repulse*, “resting” for a few days after weeks of work at Valencia and in the Balearic Islands. Peace reigned supreme. Those of the crew of H.M.S. *Repulse* who were not enjoying a well-earned spell ashore were indulging in a Sunday afternoon *siesta*. Suddenly a messenger appeared from the wireless office, carrying a signal pad. Within a very few minutes the Sunday afternoon peace had given place to frenzied preparations. Funnels belched smoke as steam was raised. Awnings were furled. Boats scurried in to the landing-places. “Blue Peters” flew at each masthead, and the syrens shrieked out the alarm to those ashore. On land, the Second Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders lent private cars, lorries, and despatch-riders to spread the alarm and get the men of H.M.S. *Repulse* back to their ship. In an incredibly short space of time all the “liberty men” were back on board, and H.M.S. *Repulse* left Gibraltar, steaming at full speed for Melilla. In the meantime the patrolling destroyer H.M.S. *Codrington* had also answered the S.O.S. Thus within two hours a destroyer and a battle cruiser stood between the small British merchant vessel

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

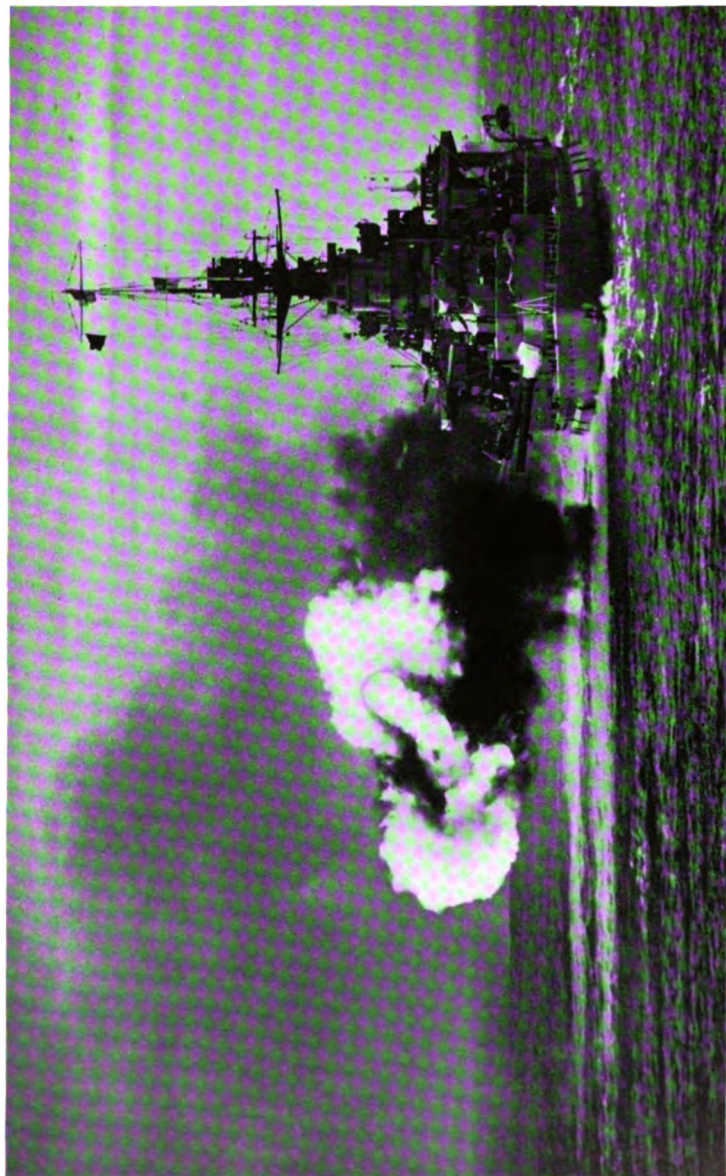
and the foreign warship which sought to dispute her right of passage.

In spite of this action, other "incidents" followed. As a result, Rear-Admiral J. F. Somerville, commanding the Destroyer Flotillas of the Mediterranean Fleet, was sent to interview the Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish Government Navy. Admiral Somerville arrived at Malaga in his flagship, H.M.S. *Galatea* – cruiser – and promptly went on board the Spanish flagship, which was none other than the cruiser *Miguel de Cervantes* which had stopped the S.S. *Gibel Zerjon*.

The British Admiral was received by the Spanish Commander-in-Chief and his Second-in-Command. The former was a lieutenant-commander named Buizo – he was apparently the only man in the Spanish Government Navy who had held officer's rank prior to the revolution. This officer was dressed in a pair of duck trousers and a blue silk pyjama coat, and his Second-in-Command sported a red shirt bearing the device of the hammer and sickle. Both wore admiral's caps. They apologised to the British Admiral for their lack of proper naval uniforms, which, they said, had not yet arrived. "Promotion has been very rapid recently," was their sinister comment.

Admiral Somerville demanded that the Spanish Commander-in-Chief should sign an undertaking then and there promising that British ships would not again be molested upon the high seas. The Spaniard at first said that he would have to consult his Government; but the firmness of the British Admiral and the strength behind him prevailed. He signed what must be one of the most unconventional ultimatums ever presented by a British naval officer.

It is probable that the pyjama-clad "Admiral" did his best to keep his bond. Certainly the *Miguel de Cervantes* stopped no more British ships upon the high seas; and such action by other ships probably pointed more to lack of control by the Spanish Commander-in-Chief over



“Thunder on the left” – a battle cruiser firing her 15-inch guns





## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

his subordinates than to lack of honesty on his part.

Three weeks after her first adventure the *Gibel Zerjon* was in trouble again. This time she was stopped by a Spanish Government destroyer when seven miles off Melilla. Two British destroyers, H.M.S. *Arrow* and H.M.S. *Anthony*, were on patrol in the vicinity, and promptly went at full speed to her aid. As they approached, the Spanish warship made off.

In the first week of October 1936 the whole aspect of the Spanish Civil War, from the naval point of view, changed. General Franco's adherents at Ferrol had been busily engaged in getting a fleet ready for sea, while the approaches to the ports of the Basque coast were being heavily mined. This latter task was performed in the first instance by armed trawlers and other small craft fitted out as minelayers, but later a large merchant vessel was converted into a minelayer.

The naval preparations at Ferrol included the fitting of guns to the after 8-inch gun-turret of the new heavy cruiser *Canarias*, which had not been completed when the revolution broke out. The commissioning of ships was assisted by the arrival at Ferrol of the cadet training-ship *Juan Sebastian de Eleana*. This ship had been on a training cruise at the outbreak of the Civil War, and she had sailed for Ferrol from Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, in the middle of August.

While General Franco's fleet was being got ready at Ferrol, the Spanish Government apparently decided to stiffen the resistance of the Basques by sending their naval forces to the north coast. The Government fleet was preceded by a few submarines, which lay in wait without success for the warships from Ferrol. So far from scoring any success with their submarines on the north coast, the Spanish Government lost the submarine B.6, which was sunk off Gijon by the Franco destroyer *Velasco* on September 19th.

During the first week in October the main portion of

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the Spanish Government fleet passed westwards through the Straits of Gibraltar and made its way to the north coast. The passage was made with great secrecy, the vessels avoiding the trade routes as far as possible, and steaming without lights. Almost simultaneously, General Franco's fleet left Ferrol and steamed south. The coincidence seems to indicate that General Franco had some knowledge of the movements of the Government ships. Whether he intended to intercept these and bring them to action, or to slip past them and seize the naval control of the waters between southern Spain and Spanish Morocco during their absence, is not known. It is probable that the latter was intended, for it promised important results with the minimum of risk.

Whatever the intention, the event proved a success for General Franco which, for a time at least, gave him command of the sea in southern waters, in the area most important to him. The opposing fleets slipped past one another during the night off the Portuguese coast. If the plan had been one of interception, it had failed through bad scouting.

The Government fleet reached the north coast of Spain, where it could accomplish little, and where it was constantly in danger from mines. General Franco's cruisers passed eastwards through the Straits of Gibraltar and carried out a "sweep" through the eastern approaches. Although the weather was misty, it was not long before the cruisers fell in with a republican patrolling destroyer. In the action which ensued the Spanish Government destroyer *Juan Ferrandiz* was sunk by gunfire. Two British destroyers, which rushed to the spot to investigate the cause of the gunfire, came near to becoming involved in the "battle."

At first it appeared that this action had been the outcome of an isolated raid, for the cruisers – the *Canarias* and the *Almirante Cervera* – turned west. It soon became clear, however, that this movement was only part

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

of the plan to sweep the straits and their approaches clear of Government warships. Later the cruisers again steamed eastwards, and they covered the transport by sea of large numbers of troops from Morocco to Spain.

The movements of these ships also created something of a panic among the Government warships which remained at Cartagena and Malaga. These put hurriedly to sea, apparently thinking that the cruisers intended to bombard these ports, and in no mind to be caught by the heavy metal of the Franco cruisers.

Actually, there was little enough that the Franco cruisers could do in the Mediterranean, and they ran considerable risk of attack by the Government submarines based on Malaga and Cartagena. They had, however, opened the passage across the straits to sea traffic, and had gained command of the sea in that area by administering a sharp blow to the patrolling forces.

The sudden naval activity on the part of both contestants in the Spanish Civil War had a considerable effect upon the responsibilities of the British naval forces concerned with the protection of British merchant ships. Particularly was this the case when General Franco, elated by his naval success, declared a "blockade" of the south and east coast of Spain and of the Basque coast. Under the letter of international law such a blockade was quite illegal.

International law holds that the institution of a blockade is a right which can be exercised by a belligerent and by nobody else. In spite of the fact that a bloody war had been raging in Spain for three months, there was, in the eyes of international law, no war. The struggle was one of revolution, and neither side could justly claim "belligerent rights." "Belligerent rights" are accorded to the opponents in an "official" war by international law. In the case of Spain, "belligerent rights" were granted to neither side. Therefore neither side could legally institute a blockade, nor indulge in the stopping

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

and searching of merchant ships which is a necessity of blockade. Moreover, international law does not accord the right of blockade even to a recognised belligerent unless that belligerent has at its disposal sufficient force to make the blockade effective. The reason for this is obvious. An ineffective blockade is likely to develop into a series of irresponsible raids on shipping, which are likely to cause annoyance and danger to neutrals without having any effect upon the war.

This was exactly what was threatened by the declarations of "blockade" of the Spanish coasts; and it at once made the task of protecting shipping on the high seas more difficult. It added the risk of interference by Spanish warships to the existing danger to shipping from bombs dropped promiscuously by both sides. There was, of course, also the danger from mines. In the early days of the Civil War this was confined to the approaches to ports on the north coast. The spread of this danger to the east coast of Spain was demonstrated in February 1937, when the British liner *Llandoverly Castle* was badly holed by a mine not far from the Catalan coast. Later a Spanish mine was to be the cause of the death of British seamen, and of a British destroyer coming within a small margin of total loss.

The bombing of ships from the air was, in the first place, confined almost entirely to the Straits of Gibraltar and its immediate approaches from the eastward. Very soon, however, it spread to a degree which would have been alarming had the pilots of the bombing machines been more efficient.

On January 19th, 1937, the French light cruiser *Maillé Brézé* was bombed when eighteen miles off Cape San Sebastian. On February 16th, 1937, two British destroyers, H.M.S. *Havock* and H.M.S. *Gipsy*, were attacked by an aeroplane when fifteen miles off Cape Tenes, nearly 400 miles to the east of Gibraltar. In this case the aircraft was quite definitely a Junker machine.

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

Six bombs were dropped, none of which hit either destroyer, and when the warships opened fire the aeroplane disappeared in the direction of the Balearic Islands. Three weeks later another British destroyer, H.M.S. *Gallant*, was attacked by aircraft which dropped bombs, fortunately without effect. The destroyer, which was off the coast between Valencia and Alicante at the time, drove off the aeroplanes with anti-aircraft fire. It was subsequently established that these aircraft came from Majorca and owed allegiance to General Franco. The usual reply was given to the British protest – an apology, and the explanation of mistaken identity.

As these incidents multiplied, the excuse of mistaken identity became less and less acceptable. All British warships operating round the coasts of Spain had the tops and sides of their gun-turrets and gun-shields painted in broad stripes of red, white, and blue, which were clearly discernible to aircraft even if flying at a great height. It became obvious, moreover, that blame for the majority of cases of irresponsible bombing lay upon the forces of General Franco.

Nor was the bombing of ships at sea the only danger to which British warships were subjected. There were supposed to be in all the Spanish ports "safety zones" in which foreign ships could anchor without danger. British warships calling at Spanish ports, either to embark refugees or to keep a watchful eye upon British interests, always anchored in the "safety zones" set apart for the purpose. In practice, however, these areas proved anything but safe during the frequent air raids and sporadic bombardments from the sea to which the Spanish ports were subjected.

On February 24th, 1937, the British battleship H.M.S. *Royal Oak* was lying off Valencia when the town was subjected to a heavy air raid by the Spanish Nationalist forces. A small anti-aircraft shell, presumably fired from one of the anti-aircraft batteries ashore,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

failed to explode in the air. It fell on the quarterdeck of H.M.S. *Royal Oak* and exploded there. Captain T. B. Drew, the commanding officer, Commander A. T. G. C. Peachey, the executive officer, Lieutenant-Commander E. R. Wilson, Petty Officer H. W. Ware, and Able Seaman G. A. Hiley were all wounded by flying splinters.

No blame could possibly attach to anybody for this incident. It demonstrated, however, that the so-called "safe" anchorages at the Spanish ports were in reality far from safe. If further proof were required, it was provided three months later, when the Newcastle steamer *Craigend* was hit by a shell during a bombardment of Almeria by the cruisers of General Franco.

Off the north coast of Spain the British warships were not subjected to attacks from aircraft during the early months of the Civil War. When, however, the forces of General Franco began to advance in earnest in the Basque territory, there were many instances of bombs falling close to British ships. On May 1st, 1937, the destroyer H.M.S. *Faulknor* was lying in the outer harbour at Bilbao when an air raid took place. Five bombs fell in the water around the destroyer, but no damage was done. This incident occurred on the day following the sinking of General Franco's only battleship – the *España* – and the raid was probably designed as a reprisal.

The *España* was sunk in somewhat extraordinary circumstances. The ship had been stopped for about half an hour when aircraft appeared, flying very high. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion, and the battleship heeled over and sank in a few minutes. In spite of the fact that the *España* was a very old ship – she had been laid down in 1913 – and was virtually undefended against air attack, those people in England who had long been proclaiming that air power had rendered the battleship a costly and useless anachronism seized upon the sinking of the Spanish battleship as proof positive of their pet theories.

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

It was subsequently proved, however, that it was not bombs from the air that had accounted for the *España*, but that, while lying with engines stopped, she had drifted on to one of the mines laid by her friends. The mine had exploded right under her bottom and had opened the ship for a great part of her length.

It was ironical that, apart from the sinking of a few small minesweepers used by the Bilbao authorities, the only damage done by the Spanish Nationalist mines off the north coast was to sink the largest unit of their own fleet. The mines, however, were a constant source of anxiety to the British destroyers operating off that coast. So was the "blockade" declared by General Franco. This was far more effective along the Basque coast than off the east coast of Spain, where it was largely an empty threat.

The existence of the "blockade" in itself raised most abstruse questions of international law. The question of territorial waters raised even more delicate problems. The three-mile limit for territorial waters is by no means universal, and it can be argued with some force that it is obsolete, having been determined in the days when it represented the strip of sea which could be commanded by guns on the shore. General Franco claimed a limit of twelve miles off-shore for territorial waters. This, naturally enough, was not conceded. Legally, of course, General Franco, not being the head of a recognised Government, had nothing to do with any question of Spanish territorial waters. There was, however, a great difference between legality and actuality.

With the return of the Spanish Government warships to the east coast of Spain, General Franco had practically undisputed command of the sea in the north. It was the tact and forbearance of both the British and the Spanish commanding officers which prevented serious "incidents" from occurring.

The question of territorial waters gave infinite trouble



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

to the captains of the British destroyers. The limit of territorial waters – even when there is no argument as to its distance from the shore – is not a chalk line on the surface of the sea. Its determination is a matter of difficulty even in clear weather, for, legally, the limit follows every promontory and indentation of the coast. The difficulty of making sure whether or not a vessel is in territorial waters at a given moment was demonstrated during the Great War. In some cases the Prize Courts deliberated for long hours, and the question resolved itself into one of a few yards.

Around the coasts of Spain there was never opportunity for long deliberation. Young naval officers in command of destroyers had frequently to come instantaneously to a decision which would have furrowed the brows of international jurists for days. Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, in an after-dinner speech in London in November 1937 paid striking tribute to the initiative of the officers who bore so much responsibility around the coasts of Spain. It was a tribute well deserved. A false step by one of the British destroyers might have created an "international incident" of the first magnitude, capable of plunging the whole of Europe into war. A right decision was always expected, even under the most difficult circumstances, and the officers of the British Navy who bore such heavy responsibility did not fail.

It was the duty of the Royal Navy to protect British shipping from interference on the "high seas" – that is, outside territorial waters. It was no part of its duty to invite an "incident" by resisting the Spanish forces within territorial waters. Nor was it part of its duty to encourage British merchant vessels to try conclusions with Spanish warships inside territorial waters, or to thrust their bluff bows into minefields known to exist. Yet this was not always appreciated by the commanders of merchant vessels, who considered that the British

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

Navy should enable them to deliver their cargoes even in a closed port behind a minefield.

Particularly was this the case with a few small British merchant ships chartered to carry foodstuffs to Bilbao. The man who became famous as "Potato Jones" was the captain of one of these ships. He was detained in St. Jean de Luz by the British naval authority, not because the Royal Navy was reluctant to give every protection to British ships upon the high seas, but because at that time Spanish territorial waters were particularly dangerous. To have allowed a British ship to attempt to enter Bilbao would have invited a grave "incident," and almost certainly led to loss of life, ship, and cargo.

The degree of protection afforded by the Royal Navy to British ships upon the high seas was reflected a few months later, when Greek and other foreign shipowners hastened to register their ships in Great Britain. By so doing they could claim British naval protection up to the limit of Spanish territorial waters, when trading with Spanish ports.

The Navy's task of protecting shipping on the high seas was complicated in the north by the spread of the naval activity of the Spanish Nationalists. This extended almost as far north as Ushant. The assumption of British nationality by foreign vessels trying to run the blockade also caused endless trouble. The chief instance of this was the Spanish merchant vessel *Mar Cantabrico*.

This ship first distinguished herself in New York, where she completed a hurried loading of munitions and slipped out of harbour, with crated aeroplanes still unstowed and littering her decks, just before the American embargo on the export of arms became law. Coast-guard cutters went in pursuit of her the moment the embargo was legally signed, but the *Mar Cantabrico* succeeded in eluding them and escaping from American territorial waters.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

The next act in this drama was a wireless S.O.S. message from a position near the middle of the Bay of Biscay. The S.O.S. gave the "call sign" (or signature) of a British merchant ship and stated that she was being shelled by a Spanish cruiser. The S.O.S. was picked up by two British destroyers which were sheltering in the harbour of St. Jean de Luz from a very bad gale. The destroyers immediately put to sea, their commanders forcing the little ships into the gale at the very best speed possible. Speed was essential if a British merchant ship was indeed being fired on by a Spanish warship, but the fury of the gale made speed not only uncomfortable but dangerous.

When the destroyers had been punching into the heavy seas for several hours they succeeded in establishing wireless communication with the Spanish cruiser *Canarias*. Then the whole story came out. The *Canarias* had intercepted the *Mar Cantabrico* – for which she had been searching for several days – and engaged her when she refused to stop. The *Mar Cantabrico* had disguised herself as a British ship, and even used the call sign of the British ship when she transmitted her S.O.S. The *Canarias* had opened fire on the *Mar Cantabrico* and forced her to surrender. The British destroyers returned to St. Jean de Luz from a singularly unpleasant wild-geese chase.

A month later there occurred off the north coast of Spain an incident which will live in the history of the sea. On April 6th the British destroyer H.M.S. *Blanche* was on patrol when she picked up a wireless request for assistance from the British steamer *Thorpehall*. Proceeding at full speed to the spot, H.M.S. *Blanche* found that the Franco cruiser *Almirante Cervera* had ordered the *Thorpehall* to stop, had fired a shot across her bows, and was threatening to sink her by gunfire. As H.M.S. *Blanche* approached the scene her wireless summoned H.M.S. *Brazen*, another patrolling destroyer, to her

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

assistance. Meanwhile H.M.S. *Blanche* cleared for action and, placing herself between the British merchant vessel and the Spanish cruiser, with guns and torpedo-tubes trained upon the latter, she demanded an explanation. In effect, H.M.S. *Blanche* told the Spaniard that, although with her heavier metal she would, if she opened fire, almost certainly sink the British destroyer, she would not herself get off unscathed.

While signals were being exchanged, H.M.S. *Brazen* dashed up, also cleared for action, and the two little destroyers escorted the British steamer to safety, keeping themselves always between her and the muzzles of the Spanish guns.

For this action Commander C. Caslon, the commanding officer of H.M.S. *Blanche*, received the approbation of the Board of Admiralty. It is difficult to realise the weight of responsibility borne by Commander Caslon at that time. He had, however, demonstrated not only to the Spanish cruiser, but to the world, that British merchant vessels are not lightly to be molested.

## CHAPTER XXI

### DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

Intervention and non-intervention – the patrol scheme – “observers” – H.M.S. *Hunter* strikes a mine – evacuation of Basque children – bombing of the *Deutschland* – German reprisals – incident of the *Leipzig* – threat of European war

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR had not been long in progress before fear of the conflict spreading to the rest of Europe elevated it to an importance far exceeding that of a domestic struggle in Spain. The opposing forces in Spain became champions of the rival ideologies which threatened to split the world into two opposing camps. On the one side lay the nations who believed in advanced Socialism akin to Communism. On the other side were the nations who were ruled by dictators, to whom the doctrines of extreme Socialism and Communism were, appropriately, like red rags to a black bull.

The Civil War in Spain became a battle of the shirts. It seemed as if time had run its cycle, and the world was reverting to the days of the crusades – with ideologies taking the place of religions, and Spain substituting the Holy Land as the battleground. But the world had progressed since the days of Cœur de Lion. More deadly weapons; more closely linked policies; swifter communications – all tended to increase the danger of the crusade in Spain becoming a struggle all over Europe between the believers in the two rival faiths.

In the Spanish conflict there lay the seeds of a world tragedy, and the Governments of the Great Powers, led by that of Great Britain, cast about for means of holding

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

the ring inviolate. It must, however, be admitted that this action was actuated more by fear of consequences than by purely altruistic desire to limit the ferocity of war to Spain.

Upon this foundation was built the edifice of non-intervention. It very soon proved to be a top-heavy structure – a sort of international belfry around which the units of several navies skimmed like bewildered bats.

The first move of non-intervention was to try to prevent both indiscriminate and highly discriminating exports of arms to Spain. In a way the procedure was somewhat similar to that of League of Nations sanctions. Perhaps that is one reason why it never appealed to Italy.

The British Government prohibited the export of munitions of war to Spain – a prohibition involving Act of Parliament. The Act set out the prohibitions in a long schedule of twenty items. Each item was designed to cover one of the many categories into which fall the manifold materials of modern war. It might be thought, by minds more attuned to common sense than legal quibbles, that the whole paraphernalia was covered by Item 17: "Appliances for use with arms and apparatus exclusively designed and intended for land, sea, or air warfare." International law, however, is a tricky business.

Concurrently there was brought into force an amendment to Section 69 of the Merchant Shipping Act, providing for the arrest of any British merchant vessel carrying prohibited arms to Spain.

This was all very impressive; but there was no blinking the fact that men belonging to most of the nations represented on the Non-Intervention Committee were, with or without the knowledge and approval of their Governments, taking an active part in the crusade of ideologies in Spain.

On the one hand, Russian tanks, aeroplanes, and other war materials were being poured into republican Spain, and Russian officers and men arrived to assist in manning

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the trenches, the tanks, the aircraft, and even the ships. Men and material were constantly finding their way into republican Spain from France. In Madrid an "International Brigade" was formed in which there served a great many British subjects.

On the other hand, both Germany and Italy were supporting General Franco with munitions and with men. It was openly stated that there were 100,000 Italian "volunteers" fighting for General Franco, and Mussolini himself admitted to 40,000. Portuguese sympathies with General Franco provided an excellent means of entry for men and materials for the Spanish Nationalists, should their direct importation to Spain be stopped.

The greater the intervention of other Powers in the Spanish Civil War the greater was the danger of the conflict spreading beyond the Peninsula. The Non-Intervention Committee, wisely shutting its eyes to existing intervention, tried to prevent its extension. A naval patrol scheme was worked out. The patrol was to prevent the importation of arms or "volunteers" into Spain. All the naval Powers concerned in non-intervention were to take part, each navy being allotted for patrol a portion of coast belonging to the ideology with which it was not in sympathy, so that there would be no temptation to cheat by looking the other way.

In the event it turned out, rather naturally, that the British Navy was expected to do nearly all the work. Particularly was this so when Soviet Russia, which had been vociferous in council on the subject of intervention by other Powers, suddenly discovered that her navy did not feel at all disposed to patrol anything, least of all the stormy south coast of the Bay of Biscay, which was the patrol area allotted to it.

In spite of everything the patrol scheme went forward. Another scheme was also evolved. This entailed "observers" being carried in all merchant vessels bound

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

for Spanish ports. "Observers" were also to be posted at ports, and at intervals along the frontier between Spain and Portugal. These "observers" had no power of action. They could only report to the Non-Intervention Committee in London. It may be doubted, therefore, whether they would ever have proved a great deterrent to the import of arms, unless publicity should form a deterrent.

The "observer" system, however, provided active and interesting work for large numbers of men. The Civil Employment Committee at the Admiralty was inundated with applications from retired naval officers. Many were enrolled, ranging in rank from admirals to warrant officers. To provide a figurehead beyond all ideological suspicion, the "observers" on board merchant vessels were placed under the command of a Dutch admiral.

The non-intervention patrol scheme was instituted on April 19th, 1937, although it had already been modified, and become somewhat attenuated owing to the inability or reluctance of some Powers to take an active part.

The patrol scheme naturally added enormously to the commitments of the Royal Navy. Nor was it long before it became painfully clear that it also involved definite danger to the ships patrolling in certain areas.

Early in the afternoon of May 13th, 1937, the British destroyer H.M.S. *Hunter* was on patrol off Almeria. The ship was, in accordance with the instructions for the non-intervention patrol scheme, well outside territorial waters. At 2.15 p.m. a violent explosion occurred below the water-line of the port side abreast the bridge.

The explosion threw up a column of oil and water as high as the masthead. The ship immediately took on a list of twenty-five degrees to starboard. It seemed that she was about to sink. This list, however, slowly disappeared. The ship righted herself and settled down on an even keel as the damaged compartments became flooded.

The force of the explosion brought down the topmast,



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

completely wrecked the wireless office, and severely damaged the whole of the bridge superstructure.

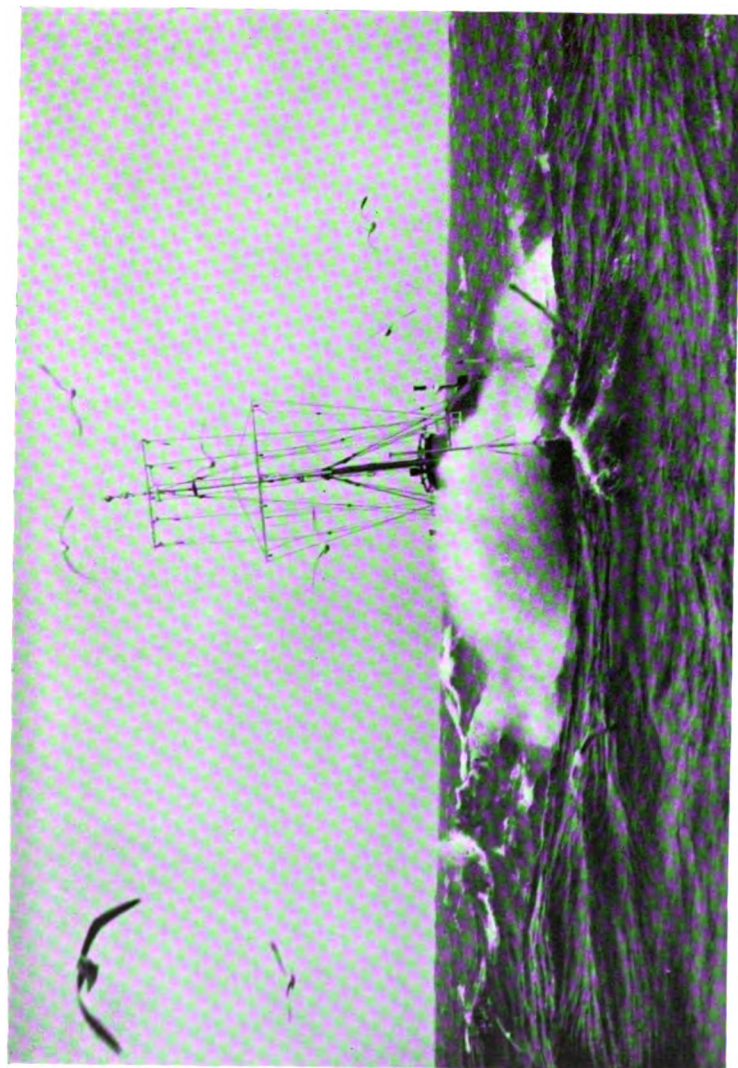
The explosion happened during the dinner-hour, and the ship was stopped and drifting under the influence of a current estimated at about one knot. It was afterwards established beyond doubt that the explosion was due to a mine. This provides an interesting coincidence. The only two warships which suffered severely from mine explosions during the Spanish Civil War – the Spanish battleship *España* and H.M.S. *Hunter* – were both stopped and drifting when the mine exploded.

Immediately after the explosion Lieutenant-Commander B. G. Scurfield, the commanding officer of H.M.S. *Hunter*, began to investigate the damage. It was found that both No. 1 and No. 2 boiler-rooms were flooded to the water-line, while four fuel tanks were open to the sea. The crew's mess-deck above these fuel tanks was a shambles, and it was afterwards found that the foremost magazine was leaking rapidly.

It was at once obvious that there were serious casualties. Lieutenant-Commander Scurfield jumped down into dark compartments (all lights had been extinguished by the force of the explosion), partially flooded with water and oil fuel, and, assisted by Lieutenant P. N. Humphreys, set about extricating the injured. When the crew of H.M.S. *Hunter* was subsequently mustered it was found that eight men had been killed and fourteen wounded.

Meanwhile the ship was settling rapidly by the head, and it seemed certain that she must sink. Orders were therefore given for the ship to be abandoned. It soon became clear, however, that H.M.S. *Hunter* was not going to sink, and the ship's company re-embarked.

Tribute has been paid to the robust construction of our destroyers in a paper read before the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland on the subject of the damage received by H.M.S. *Hunter*, full details of which were supplied by the Admiralty.



“Taking it green” – a destroyer in dirty weather



## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

This tribute was fully justified. The ship had been practically split in half below the bridge, the keel had been broken, boilers had been forced off their seatings, and the explosion had lifted the forepart of the ship to such an extent that the hull plating had buckled all round the ship in a secondary area of damage some little distance from the stern.

Very few destroyers which struck mines during the Great War remained afloat, although parts of some which were blown in half floated. The classic instance was that of H.M.S. *Nubian* and H.M.S. *Zulu*. Both ships struck mines. The forepart of H.M.S. *Nubian* was blown off and sank. The after part of H.M.S. *Zulu* was blown off and sank. The other halves of both ships were towed to port. These were joined together to make one destroyer – which figured in the Navy List as H.M.S. *Zubian*.

H.M.S. *Hunter* settled down until nearly all her lower-deck scuttles (or port-holes) below the forecastle were under water. There she “hung” and showed no signs of sinking further. The bulkheads were holding.

The ship was towed into Almeria by local Spanish craft. There a further examination was carried out. A temporary “cofferdam” was built over the worst of the damage, and the bulkheads were strengthened and shored up. It was then decided to tow H.M.S. *Hunter* to Gibraltar for the very extensive repairs which would be necessary.

On May 14th H.M.S. *Hunter* left Almeria in tow of the cruiser H.M.S. *Arethusa*. It was a very hazardous voyage. H.M.S. *Hunter* had to be towed stern first, owing to the damage which she had sustained forward; and slow speed was necessary on account of the pounding of the sea on the flat stern of the destroyer. Fortunately, the weather remained calm, but, even so, the passage of 150 miles to Gibraltar occupied two and a half days.

It was only after H.M.S. *Hunter* had been placed in dry-dock at Gibraltar that the full extent of the damage

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

could be ascertained. In the words of Mr. H. Stanley of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors:

"The explosion appeared to have taken place near the forward end of the bilge keel on the port side, and followed a path upwards and aft, to come out through the upper deck near the starboard side of the galley. The ship was cut in two . . . through the keel and up to the lower edge of the sheerstrake port and starboard. On the starboard side, the damage showed as a more or less vertical cut, but the port side was blown in and up, so that in elevation the hole was roughly a trapezium 18 feet in length at the top and 35 feet at the keel. . . . All the internal structure up to the upper deck was destroyed, the upper deck being badly bulged upwards at the break of the forecastle."

Truly it says something for British shipbuilding that the ship did not break up and sink.

In answer to a question in the House of Commons on November 24th, 1937, Mr. Anthony Eden stated that the British Government held General Franco responsible for the damage done to H.M.S. *Hunter*. He said that, while it was not possible to estimate the final totals, the British Ambassador had been instructed to state that the cost of the damage to H.M.S. *Hunter* was anticipated to be in the region of £124,000, and that a capital sum of about £10,500 would be required to pay compensation to the dependants of those killed and injured. H.M.S. *Hunter* was a new ship which had only been commissioned for service on September 30th, 1936. Her total cost had been just over £300,000.

Although there can never be any justification for the laying of mines, particularly outside territorial waters, by the contestants in a civil war, it was possible to argue that there was an element of accident in the mining of H.M.S. *Hunter*. The mine might have broken away from moor-

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

ings inside territorial waters and drifted seawards. This, however, seems exceedingly unlikely. The sea was calm and the ship was not moving through the water, yet the lookouts saw nothing. The mine could not, therefore, have been floating awash, as mines usually do when they have broken adrift from their moorings. Moreover, had the mine not been moored it would have been drifting under the influence of the same current as the ship, and, since there was no wind at all, the two drifting objects would not then be expected to come into violent contact.

It cannot be argued that either of the two incidents which followed in the next fortnight were due to "accidents." The fact that one of these was due to the forces of General Franco and the other to those of the Spanish Government showed that a growing irresponsibility was common to both sides in the Spanish Civil War.

The first incident took place off the north coast of Spain on May 23rd, 1937. A large number of Basque children were being evacuated from the war area in the Spanish liner *Habaña*. The *Habaña* was being escorted through territorial waters by Spanish armed trawlers when aircraft appeared. They dropped bombs, not upon the armed trawlers, but in the vicinity of the British steamer *Oakgrove*, two members of the crew of which were wounded by flying splinters. It was afterwards stated that the bombs were intended for the armed trawlers; but there was no similarity whatever between these and the British cargo steamer, and an appreciable distance separated them. It was, undoubtedly, unwise of the Basque authorities to provide warship escort for the *Habaña*, but the bombing of the British ship by aircraft owing allegiance to General Franco was indefensible.

General Franco knew of the arrangements which had been made for the evacuation of the Basque children, and, if the bombing aim of his pilots was as bad as he tried to represent, attack on the armed trawlers might well

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

have involved heavy casualties among the children in the *Habana*.

Seven days later, on May 30th, there occurred in the Mediterranean the only incident of the Spanish Civil War in which a warship was hit by a bomb. This incident had, by reason of its international implications, an even greater gravity than that lent it by the fact that it caused nearly a hundred casualties, and serious damage to a warship belonging to one of the Powers engaged in the non-intervention patrol scheme.

On the morning of May 30th the German "pocket battleship" *Deutschland* was at anchor off the Balearic Island of Iviza. With the exception of the lookouts and other men on watch, the whole crew was at breakfast when aircraft appeared. These dived from a great height and delivered a bombing attack on the battleship.

The alarm was at once given on board the *Deutschland*, and men rushed to the anti-aircraft guns. But before these could be brought properly into action the aeroplanes had dropped their bombs and zoomed away into the shelter of the low clouds. One of the bombs crashed through the light plating of the forecastle deck and exploded in the mess-deck, which was crowded with men leaving their interrupted breakfasts and hurrying to their stations. This bomb killed twenty men and wounded seventy-three.

The excuse of mistaken identity could not possibly be accepted in this case, even by the most credulous and conciliatory of Governments. Germany certainly did not accept it. The *Deutschland*, even when viewed from the air, was quite unlike any warship in the service of General Franco. Moreover, the attack, unlike most of the bombing attacks on ships, was delivered from a low altitude, so that recognition should have been an easy matter. It was clear that the aircraft came from Catalonia, where feeling against the opposite ideology as represented by Germany and Italy was running extremely high.

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

The German naval forces in Spanish waters immediately embarked upon reprisals. These included the bombardment from the sea of Almeria and other coast towns of republican Spain. Germany has been reviled for embarking upon these reprisals, it being said that the towns which were bombarded were "open towns." They were, however, places with fortified areas, and were used as bases for both the naval and the air forces of the Spanish Government. In any event, the reprisals were by no means as irresponsible as the bombing of ships which had been suffered by both France and England.

The term "reprisals" is, for some reason, abhorrent to the British public – and this in spite of the fact that the only declared defence of England against air attack lies in reprisals and the threat of reprisals. Yet there is no doubt of one thing: the German reprisals against Spanish ports after the bombing of the *Deutschland* gave, to the ships of all nations, a degree of immunity from irresponsible air attack in the vicinity of the Spanish coast which they had been very far from enjoying in the previous months. There was not a single case of air attack being delivered upon a British ship, either of the Royal Navy or the mercantile marine, between the time of the bombing of the *Deutschland*, and the German reprisals, and the withdrawal of the German naval forces from the vicinity of Spain.

In the meantime, however, a new menace to shipping arose. This was the firing of torpedoes at ships by submarines. Again a blow was aimed at a unit of the German Navy, and this time it had even wider international repercussions.

The German cruiser *Leipzig* was off Oran when, at 3.37 p.m. on June 18th, 1937, the watchkeeper on the under-water sound-detecting apparatus reported the noise of a torpedo engine. A torpedo engine running under water, it may be remarked, makes a noise which can be heard clearly with the aid of sensitive hydrophones,



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

and which is quite unlike the sound of any other form of propulsion. The *communiqué* subsequently issued by the German Government was as follows:

“The shot was noticed quite unmistakably by underwater sound detector apparatus and by observing the air bubbles which show themselves clearly on the water in the case of a torpedo from a submarine. The ship immediately turned towards the bubbles as a defence manœuvre. When she passed over the spot from where the torpedo had been launched, several stokers in the engine-room heard a hard metallic knock against the outside of the hull which sounded like a heavy blow from a hammer. This was followed by a scraping noise. The knock was so hard they immediately concluded it must have been a submarine. The same observation was made by two engineers who at the same time were on a staircase leading down to the engine control room. A loud noise was heard which sounded as though a metallic object had been scraped along the hull from front to rear. These observations were confirmed on June 20th by examination by divers. On the outer hull beneath the water-line, in the neighbourhood of the afore-mentioned rooms, a dent was found with a diameter of about six inches. It has thus been proved that the *Leipzig* either touched part of the superstructure of a submarine, or that a torpedo which did not explode hit the hull at an acute angle and then slid off.”

The effects of this incident upon the international “keeping of the ring” round Spain were so profound that it is as well to examine it in detail. Many criticisms were levelled by expert opinion at the German *communiqué* describing the incident.

The modern torpedo does not leave a track of bubbles on the surface of the sea. When, however, a torpedo is

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

fired from a submarine, it is shot out of the torpedo-tube by compressed air. The result is a patch of bubbles which varies in different designs from a large splash to a few bubbles hardly discernible at a distance. It was probably to this "firing splash" rather than the track left by the torpedo that the German *communiqué* referred. That is a small point. The main criticism of the German *communiqué* rested upon a belief in certain quarters that it was a complete "frame-up" dictated by political expediency.

This theory rested upon several foundations. In the first place, it was held that the sound-detecting apparatus would not be manned in peacetime unless a submarine were expected to be in the vicinity. It was suggested that, since there were German submarines in Spanish waters at the time, the *Leipzig* was carrying out exercises with one or more of them when an accident occurred which resulted in one of the submarines being rammed and sunk. Such accidents are apt to happen during exercises, and it was held that, by declaring that the *Leipzig* had been attacked by an "unknown" submarine, the German naval authorities were not only concealing a tragedy, but giving their Government an excuse to withdraw from the non-intervention patrol scheme — a scheme with which it had been profoundly dissatisfied since the bombing of the *Deutschland*. Those who held this view read confirmation of their opinion into reports which became current some months later to the effect that relatives of some German naval men had been informed that a German submarine had been lost with all hands. These reports, however, referred to the submarine U.18, which was sunk by collision during exercises off Kiel in November 1936, and was salvaged shortly afterwards.

Criticisms and doubts of the veracity of the German *communiqué* would certainly not have been so lightly accepted if it had been foreseen that the situation in the Mediterranean was very soon to become dominated by

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the activities of "unknown" submarines. It is true that the activities of the "unknown" submarines in later months were to proclaim them as supporters of the ideology of the "Right," and therefore in sympathy with Germany, Italy, and General Franco, but against this one must set the fact that the whole of the Spanish submarine force had started the war on the side of the Government, and that the greater part of it undoubtedly still belonged to the "Left."

As a result of the attack on the *Leipzig*, Germany promptly gave notice of her withdrawal from the non-intervention patrol of the Spanish coasts by international naval forces. The withdrawal of Germany would, if the scheme had been prolonged, have placed an even greater strain upon the resources of the British Navy. Moreover, Italy saw eye to eye with Germany. The non-intervention patrol was therefore virtually abandoned on July 3rd, 1937, after it had been in operation for only two and a half months.

The withdrawal of Germany from the international naval patrol brought the threat of a spread of the Spanish struggle to the rest of Europe closer than it had ever been. The "Rome-Berlin axis" in its north-south conception had not yet been declared, but there was considerable sympathy between Germany and Italy. There was also the possibility of an east-west "axis" between Rome and the Balearic Islands, where both Italians and Germans appeared to have gained considerable footing. Any such "axis" would obviously have affected the whole of Western Europe. It would have threatened French communications with North Africa. It is on this trade route that must pass, in the event of war, the reinforcements for the French Army. A threat to this trade route, therefore, laid an explosive charge against the Maginot Line—the famous chain of fortifications guarding France's north-eastern frontier.

Germany and Italy were deeply involved in Spain, both

## DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS

by reason of their faiths, and because of the materials and "volunteers" sent to the assistance of General Franco. These two nations were heartily sick of non-intervention and of its champion, Great Britain – Germany because of the *Deutschland* and *Leipzig* incidents, and Italy because of persistent Press agitation in England and references to the "rout" of Italian troops in Spain.

At the time, few people in England appreciated the full gravity of the situation. There were, however, very worried faces in Whitehall when reports came in which showed that the German naval forces, instead of leaving the Mediterranean after their withdrawal from the non-intervention patrol, were steaming east.

Was the German Navy proposing to effect a junction with the Italian Navy before war was declared on France, who, by her swing to the "Left" and sympathies with the Spanish Government, had by this time again become anathema to Italy? Or was it only that German "reprisals" for the *Leipzig* incident were in the wind?

For several hours these questions dominated the situation. Then they were suddenly answered in the negative. The German naval forces turned westwards and left the Mediterranean.

Just what happened in those hours is not known. It may never be known. It is clear, however, that for a short time Europe was nearer than ever to being plunged into general war.

## CHAPTER XXII

### PIRATE SUBMARINES

Abandonment of non-intervention patrols – appearance of pirate submarines – torpedo fired at H.M.S. *Havock* – counter-attacking action – who were the pirates?

AFTER THE ABANDONMENT of the original non-intervention sea patrol scheme, patrolling was continued by British warships pending some solution of the deadlock. Fortunately, deadlock and breathing-space went, for a time, hand in hand.

The patrolling British warships were thus able to concentrate upon the protection of British shipping on the high seas. Nor did this task appear difficult during the months of May, June, and July. In those months there was only one instance of the molestation of a British merchant ship by Spanish forces.

This was the steamer *Gwenhills*, which was fired on by a Spanish Nationalist warship in the vicinity of Bilbao on June 21st. Once again it was a question of the determination of the limit of territorial waters. Again the ship was saved by the prompt appearance of a British destroyer and a sharp admonition of the Spanish action. As the British steamer had not been hit, and as there appeared to be considerable doubt as to whether she had been inside or outside territorial waters when called upon to stop, the incident was then considered as closed.

August ushered in a very different state of affairs. On August 6th two British merchant ships were bombed in the Mediterranean.

The steamer *Noemijulia* was attacked by three bombing

## PIRATE SUBMARINES

aircraft when off Cape Negro, on the northern sector of the Catalan coast, but was not hit. The oil tanker *British Corporal* was thirty miles west of Almeria when she was attacked by aircraft. In this instance the attacker, a three-engined monoplane with yellow body and grey wings and tail, adopted new tactics. Bombs were dropped and then, as the crew were endeavouring to escape in the boats, the aircraft dived and opened fire with machine guns. On the same day the Italian steamer *Mongioia* and the French steamer *Djebel Amour* were also attacked from the air.

In three of these four attacks there was no doubt that the assailants were acting on behalf of General Franco. It was clear that General Franco was exerting himself to the utmost to make effective his "blockade" of the east coast of Spain. One can hardly blame him for the desire to do so. In principle, the establishment of the scheme to prevent intervention in the Spanish Civil War by the institution of naval patrols was perfectly fair to both sides in Spain. But it had also the effect of keeping the sea open, and the supply of war material to Spanish Government territory continued throughout the year. Proof of this lies in figures produced by the Soviet Government itself. These showed that Soviet Russia exported to Spain in 1937 no less than ten times as much as she had in 1936. Moreover, it was openly boasted by the Russian Red Army newspaper that Russian aircraft had hopelessly outclassed German and Italian machines in Spain.

Only if he were granted belligerent rights could General Franco exercise his naval and air forces to the utmost in order to make his "blockade" effective; and belligerent rights were refused to him by the Powers. The reason is not far to seek. Although both parties were granted belligerent rights during the American Civil War, it would have created a most dangerous precedent if such rights had been granted to General Franco. It would have entailed legalising and approving a struggle of ideologies which had been, in the first

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

instance, armed insurrection against an established Government. Moreover, the granting of belligerent rights to General Franco would inevitably have led to serious interference with neutral shipping upon the most thickly populated trade route of the world.

But, while it is easy to understand and even to sympathise with General Franco's motives, the methods which he employed excited uneasiness and wrath among all the nations interested in seaborne commerce in the Mediterranean.

In addition to the air attacks on merchant vessels, which took on a new and more serious aspect, both by reason of the sudden increase in their number and because of the new and more dangerous methods employed in the attack on the *British Corporal*, submarines began to attack merchant vessels in the Mediterranean.

On August 29th the British steamer *Carpio* was attacked by a submarine when about fifteen miles north of Cape San Antonio. A torpedo was fired at the ship, but it missed its mark. On August 31st a torpedo was fired by an "unknown" submarine at the British destroyer H.M.S. *Havock*, on patrol in a position about twenty miles south-east of Cape San Antonio. On September 1st the British merchant ship *Woodford* was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine when off Benicarlo, about ninety-five miles south-west of Barcelona.

A thrill of horror passed through the civilised world. Here was threat of return to the situation which obtained during the German unrestricted submarine campaign of the Great War. This was precisely what the Powers had recently been trying to make impossible of repetition, by securing universal agreement to regulations designed for the "humanising" of submarine warfare, and first set out in the London Naval Treaty of 1930.

Great Britain is the naval Power most vulnerable to unrestricted submarine warfare; and Great Britain took immediate steps to prevent the growth of the submarine

## PIRATE SUBMARINES

menace to merchant vessels in the Mediterranean. The steps were both diplomatic and naval.

Orders had already been given to all British warships operating round the coasts of Spain that, in the event of their being attacked, they were to take strong counter-attacking action.

There was no shadow of doubt that H.M.S. *Havock* was actually attacked by a submarine. It is as well to make this clear, since an ill-advised statement by the British Admiralty in connection with a later incident has led to the authenticity of the attack on H.M.S. *Havock* being doubted in certain quarters. The "firing splash" of released compressed air when the torpedo was fired was clearly seen. The torpedo passed close under the destroyer and was clearly heard, and the oil track was plainly seen. Moreover, the submarine herself broke surface slightly on firing, although not sufficiently to enable her identity to be established.

In H.M.S. *Havock* the helm was immediately put hard over, and the speed of the engines was increased to "full speed." In the Royal Navy, unlike the mercantile marine, the order for "full speed" is an emergency order calling for every ounce of steam. H.M.S. *Havock* dashed up the track of the torpedo to the position from which it had been fired. As she passed over this position, a "pattern" of depth-charges was dropped.

Depth-charges are drum-shaped bombs containing 300 pounds of high explosive (T.N.T.) and fitted with a firing mechanism actuated by the sea pressure. They can be set to explode on reaching a given depth below the surface. Depth-charges in a destroyer are carried in racks at the stern, whence they can be rolled off down a sort of chute. They can also be fired from mortar-like howitzers fixed to fire them out on either beam of the destroyer. These howitzers will lob a depth-charge a distance of about forty yards from the track of a destroyer.

A "pattern" of depth-charges normally consists of four



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

charges dropped when the destroyer is travelling at speed — as it must do in order to carry its stern clear of the effects of concussion before the charges reach their depth and explode. The first charge of a “pattern” is dropped from one of the stern chutes. After a given interval, depending upon the speed of the ship, both port and starboard depth-charge howitzers are fired simultaneously. After another short interval the fourth charge is dropped from the other stern chute. Thus the depth-charges are placed in a diamond-shaped pattern about eighty yards across, with the wake of the destroyer running diagonally through it.

When a “pattern” of depth-charges is used, the charges are usually “staggered for depth” — that is, each charge is set to explode at a different depth below the surface. Thus, both in the horizontal and in the vertical planes, there is the maximum chance of one of the charges exploding sufficiently near to the submarine to crush her hull or cause serious damage.

The effect of any under-water explosion is increased by the pressure of water around the explosion. In the case of a submerged submarine, the pressure of the explosion is superimposed upon the sea pressure to which the hull is already subjected. The exact radius at which a depth-charge will crush the hull of a submarine under various conditions is a matter of official secrecy.

Men who have been subjected to depth-charge attack when serving in submarines during the Great War testify to its terrifying nature. Quite apart from damage done to the hull, machinery, or delicate electrical mechanism, the moral effect of depth-charge explosions upon the crew of a submarine is such that it is likely to add to the danger.

The great advantage of a destroyer over a submarine once the presence of the latter is known lies in the great disparity in the speeds of the two craft. A destroyer at full speed is capable of something over thirty-five knots. The best speed of a submarine when submerged is eight

## PIRATE SUBMARINES

or nine knots; and this speed must be used exceedingly sparingly, since it squanders the power of the electric batteries which is the only means of submerged propulsion.

In the case of the attack on H.M.S. *Havock*, the torpedo was fired at a range of rather less than one thousand yards. Allowing for the time taken in turning and for the gradual acceleration when the engine-room telegraphs were put to "full speed," the destroyer would be dropping her depth-charges in about three minutes from the time the torpedo passed under her. In that time the submarine, even at full speed and not allowing for acceleration to that speed or for any alteration of course, could not have travelled a thousand yards. Yet, in spite of all manner of circumstantial tales of oil patches and the like, the official opinion was that the submarine had not been sunk.

One is tempted to think that this may have been a case of the wish being father to the thought. Certainly Whitehall hoped that the submarine had got away. This was because it was not certain that the submarine in question was Spanish or manned by a Spanish crew. There was fear that, if the submarine were sunk, incontrovertible evidence of the complicity of another Power in an act of piracy might float to the surface.

Had the attacks of submarines upon shipping in the Mediterranean been confined to those on the *Carpio*, H.M.S. *Havock*, and the *Woodford*, there would not have been serious grounds for the belief that the term "unknown submarines" involved vessels which had not been Spanish at the outbreak of the Civil War. More than nine months before, there had been reasons for believing that one of the Spanish submarines which had started the war on the side of the Government had joined General Franco.

On November 23rd, 1936, the Spanish Government cruiser *Miguel de Cervantes* was lying off Cartagena when an explosion occurred below the water-line. The ship was hastily docked, and examination proved that the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

explosion had been that of a torpedo fired from a submarine. Two days later the naval correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* was able to state that he had learnt "on excellent authority" that the explosion which disabled the *Miguel de Cervantes* "was caused by a torpedo from a Spanish submarine which went over to the insurgents last week." Although the *Daily Telegraph* stated that "in London naval circles the identification of the submarine which attacked the *Miguel de Cervantes* as a Spanish unit is hailed with relief"; the "excellent authority" did not divulge the initial letter and number of the submarine which had joined General Franco.

This was a pity. Had it done so, it would have avoided a number of wild and injudicious guesses by badly informed persons into the identity of the "unknown submarines." Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, as early as November 1936, the discovery that the attack was carried out by a submarine of Spanish nationality was "hailed with relief." In that phrase lies proof of a definite fear and suspicion in Whitehall that submarines other than Spanish might be operating on behalf of General Franco.

At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the Spanish Navy contained fifteen submarines. Of these, however, three were building at Cartagena and none of these has been completed. Only twelve submarines were available for service at the outbreak of the Civil War. All these vessels were based upon Cartagena, and they consequently formed part of the fleet at the disposal of the Spanish Government. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether the Spanish Government commanded a personnel capable of handling all these submarines; particularly after the wholesale mutiny which accompanied the beginning of the Civil War and led to the murder of the majority of the officers. This view appears to have been confirmed by reports of the arrival of Russian submarine officers at Cartagena during the first six months of the war.

It is possible to account for six of the Spanish

## PIRATE SUBMARINES

submarines. C.1 was damaged by a bomb from an aeroplane when operating on the surface in the Straits of Gibraltar early in the Civil War. Her stern casting was cracked and she was unable to dive. Since the dockyard at Cartagena was incapable of making good this defect, C.1 can be regarded as removed from the list for the duration of the war.

C.3 was sunk in the harbour of Malaga in December 1936. She was salvaged some months later and towed to Cadiz for refit. It is very doubtful if, under the stress of civil war, the extensive repairs which C.3 must have required have been completed. If this submarine is again a seagoing unit, it is now, of course, in the forces of General Franco.

In November 1937 both C.2 and C.4 were under repair in French ports. This proclaims them as still owing allegiance to the Spanish Government.

B.1 was damaged by collision with a merchant ship at Alicante in November 1937, so that up to that date she was still among the Government forces. B.6 was sunk by the Franco destroyer *Velasco* off Gijon in September 1936.

There remain six Spanish submarines which have not been accounted for. Of these we know, from the statement in the *Daily Telegraph* after the attack on the *Miguel de Cervantes*, that one is in the service of General Franco. If the reports that most of the Government submarines were officered by Russians are true, it is hardly reasonable to suppose that any more vessels have joined the "Right."

General Franco cannot, therefore, be credited with possession of more than two Spanish submarines in August 1937, and that number only in the improbable event of the repairs to C.3 having been rapidly and efficiently carried out. Yet the submarine activity on behalf of General Franco indicated that several submarines were concerned. The British Government, and the Governments of other Powers – with all their combined facilities for "intelligence" – soon gave evidence of their opinion that the submarine attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean were not the work of one – or even

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

two – Franco submarines. The diplomatic phrase “unknown submarines” was coined to describe the pirates.

It was quite possible – even probable – that the submarine which attacked the S.S. *Carpio* on August 29th was the same vessel which attacked H.M.S. *Havock* on August 31st. The positions of the two attacks were only about twenty-three miles apart. It was possible, too, that the same submarine was responsible for the sinking of the S.S. *Woodford* on the following day, in a position about a hundred and thirty miles to the northward.

A hundred and thirty miles represents only about nine hours' passage at full speed on the surface to one of the Spanish submarines of the “B” class. But in this case the probability was not strong. Even if the submarine which attacked H.M.S. *Havock* had escaped serious damage during the destroyer's counter-attack, it would certainly have received a bad “shaking up,” and its personnel would probably have been reluctant to embark upon another attack within a few hours. Moreover, the presence of the British destroyer which had counter-attacked with depth-charges would almost certainly have necessitated the submarine remaining submerged for several hours, thus considerably adding to the time interval before it could reach the position in which the S.S. *Woodford* was sunk.

Apart altogether from these attacks, submarine attacks on foreign merchant vessels were reported in positions as widely separated and remote from Spain as the southern end of the Tyrrhenian Sea – which lies between Italy and Sardinia and between the latitude of north Corsica and that of Sicily – and the northern part of the Ægean Sea. It was at once obvious that there were not one or two Franco submarines at work, but quite a number of “unknown” submarines.

The pirate submarines continued to be alluded to as “unknown,” although some of them had been seen on the surface. These, it was reported, had all distinguishing

## PIRATE SUBMARINES

letters and numbers carefully painted out. They exhibited the Spanish Nationalist colours, and their crews were dressed in what M. Litvinov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, described as "disguised uniforms."

As to the identity of these "unknown" submarines, there have been many conjectures, some of which have been coupled with thinly veiled accusations of piracy against those Powers whose ideologies run parallel with that of General Franco. The most logical explanation of the identity of these vessels, and that believed by many British naval officers, was that they were of Italian origin, and had joined the forces of General Franco in much the same way as Italian and German volunteers fought on his side on land; while Russian, French, and even British volunteers fought against him. It was believed that the Italian Government and Signor Mussolini were not directly responsible for them or their actions. It would have been easy for the authorities to look the other way while volunteers took old submarines, for which authority had little further use, to sea to fight on the side which had the acknowledged sympathies of the head of their Government.

Support for this view of the identity of the "unknown" submarines is to be found in the fact that the submarine or submarines which was or were operating in the northern Ægean on behalf of General Franco must have been using the Italian naval bases in the Dodecanese.

Later it became known that two old Italian submarines of the Galvini class, as well as four old Italian destroyers, had been "sold" to General Franco.

When the submarine campaign began, it was not yet condemned by the Powers as piracy upon the high seas. The efforts of the "unknown" submarines were obviously directed chiefly against cargoes consigned to Spanish Government ports from the Black Sea – cargoes which were being carried in defiance of the principle of non-intervention. Soviet Russia had declared herself in agreement with the principle of non-intervention, but the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

cargoes of war materials still passed to the ports of republican Spain, albeit many of them were carried in ships which had recently and hastily acquired British nationality. These war materials were directed against Italian volunteers in Spain, and relations between Italy and Soviet Russia were in a state of extreme tension. Russia openly accused Italy of being responsible for the submarine attacks on merchant vessels.

The retort of the British Government to the appearance in the Mediterranean of submarines of piratical tendencies towards shipping was to issue secret orders to the British fleet that any submarine which refused to answer a challenge, and behaved in a suspicious manner, was to be attacked, and, if possible, sunk.

These orders were immediately communicated to the French, Italian, and German Governments – the Governments of the only nations other than Spain likely to have submarines at sea in the Mediterranean proper. At the same time, diplomatic overtures were made recommending the holding of a conference to determine “collective action.”

There was a great difference between this conference, both in the manner of its calling and in the manner of its conduct, and the usual run of conferences having “collective action” as their objective. There was none of the usual diplomatic shilly-shallying known as “preparing the ground.” Concessions were made to susceptibilities, but these were slight and did not lead to delay. For reasons patent on both sides of the English Channel, the conference was held near enough to Geneva to be considered “within the framework of the League”; but, since it was known that Italy would not go to Geneva, it was held in the little lakeside town of Nyon, some fifteen miles away. This failed to bring Italy into the conference, but it succeeded in taking the conference away from the leisurely procedure beloved by the League Secretariat, and infused into it an atmosphere of urgency.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CLEARING SHOWERS

The Nyon Conference – anti-piracy patrol – cessation of submarine activities – the *Basilisk* incident – sinkings by aircraft and submarines – end of Biscay coast patrol

THE FIRST SUBMARINE ATTACK upon a merchant vessel took place on August 29th, 1937. On September 9th there met at Nyon the representatives of nine Powers – Great Britain, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Greece, Rumania, Turkey, Soviet Russia, and Yugo-Slavia. Italy was not represented.

The importance of the conference in the eyes of Great Britain was shown by the strength of the British delegation. It was headed by Mr. Anthony Eden, who had conversations in Paris on his way to Geneva. The British technical delegation was headed by Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, and he was accompanied by the Director of the Plans Division of the Naval Staff and two other officers from the Admiralty.

The British delegation arrived at Nyon with their plan cut and dried and plotted upon a roll of charts under the arm of one of the naval officers. It was clear that the conference was to be concerned solely with the determination of small modifications to this plan which might be desired by the other nations.

The plenary meetings of the Nyon Conference seemed to be chiefly concerned with trying to prevent M. Litvinov, of Soviet Russia, from making long and inflammatory speeches directed against Italy.

The conference was not without its unconscious



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

humour. The Mayor of Nyon, in welcoming the conference to his town, seemed to have more knowledge of ancient history than of current international jealousies. Speaking of the long history of the town, he referred in glowing terms to its occupation by the Roman legions. Perhaps it was this reference which determined M. Litvinov to have his fling. He spoke at some length, but, almost before he had regained his chair, Mr. Eden was on his feet. The British Foreign Secretary then made the shortest and strongest speech of his career. In effect, and in not more than two or three sentences, he said: "This is no time for talk; let us get down to business." The British delegate was not going to allow the conference in the little "Salle Communale" to become infected with the spirit of the name of the open space outside – the Place Perdtemps.

On September 14th the "Nyon Arrangement" was formally signed – quick work for an international conference, particularly considering that a week-end intervened.

The "arrangement" provided for the patrolling of the whole of the Mediterranean by warships. It was agreed that all innocent submarines were to be kept in harbour or in certain specified exercise areas. Any submarine discovered "in the vicinity of a position where a ship not belonging to either of the conflicting Spanish parties has recently been attacked" was to be sunk at sight or sound.

This provision, of course, was based upon the relatively slow speed of a submarine, especially when submerged. The orders given to the warships were not included in the text of the "arrangement." They were to the effect that any submarine found within a specified distance of the position of an attack at any given time after the attack was to be deemed guilty, and, if possible, sunk without further ado. Outside this "area of certain guilt" was an "area of strong suspicion." Any submarine found in this

## CLEARING SHOWERS

area would have to give satisfactory account of itself if it wished to avoid action.

In an annexe to the "arrangement" there were laid down specified routes which the merchant ships of all the participating Powers were to be advised to follow, in order to gain the maximum of protection from the patrolling warships.

For Italy, the "Nyon Arrangement" reserved the Tyrrhenian Sea, "which may form the subject of special arrangement." The burden of the whole patrol apart from this area was to fall jointly upon Great Britain and France. Great Britain was, naturally, to undertake the greater part of the patrolling, and provide sixty-three destroyers for the task.

It is an ironical comment upon the London Naval Treaty of 1930 that the number of British destroyers required to patrol the Mediterranean – in conjunction with another naval Power strong in destroyers – against a few piratical submarines of doubtful efficiency, should amount to three-fifths of the total destroyer tonnage allotted to the whole British Empire under that treaty.

Italy did not consider the patrolling of only the Tyrrhenian Sea as consonant with her dignity as a great Mediterranean Power. The exact extent of Italian participation in the anti-piracy patrol scheme was not determined until October 30th, when a conference was held on board the British battleship H.M.S. *Barham* at Bizerta between Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the British Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, Admiral Esteva and Admiral Blery of the French Navy, and Admiral Bernotti of the Italian Navy. Nevertheless, the greater part of the patrol system envisaged by the "Nyon Arrangement" came into force as soon as it was signed.

This, of course, led to the reorganisation of the destroyer flotillas in the Mediterranean, and imposed a great deal more work, not only upon the naval staffs, but upon the personnel of the ships.

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

For some time after the signing of the "Nyon Arrangement" it seemed as if all these movements and patrol arrangements were unnecessary. Mr. Eden had said at Nyon that he thought the anti-piracy patrol scheme would have a great deterrent effect. He went further. When talking to a journalist, he held up the famous "Eden hat." "If the conference doesn't stop piracy, I'll eat this," he declared.

For a long time it seemed that he was right. Between the signing of the "Nyon Arrangement" and the end of the year not a single instance of piratical attack upon a neutral merchant vessel by a submarine was reported. There was no doubt, however, that it was not so much the signatures of statesmen as the knowledge that warships had orders to sink on sight or sound, which persuaded the "unknown" submarines that the game of molesting shipping upon the high seas was not worth the risk.

On October 4th, 1937, it appeared that the deterrent effect of the anti-piracy patrol had already begun to wear off. On this day it was reported that the British destroyer H.M.S. *Basilisk* had been attacked by an "unknown" submarine while off the east coast of Spain.

The weather at the time of the alleged attack was decidedly "patchy." There was a choppy and confused sea, a squally wind, and bad light. H.M.S. *Basilisk* was patrolling and on the watch for submarines – as were all destroyers on patrol after the attack on H.M.S. *Havock*. That is to say, the submarine-detecting devices were manned and in operation.

The detector detected something which might well have been a submarine, and immediately reported to the bridge. On the bridge a lookout, straining his eyes for sign of danger, saw a suspicious line on the surface of the water. He reported the track of a torpedo. The officer of the watch on the bridge acted promptly. The helm was put over, and the engine-room telegraphs jerked to "full speed." Within three minutes depth-charges were



“Up she goes” – H.M.S. *Courageous* lifts to a big sea – taking  
a lot of it with her



## CLEARING SHOWERS

being dropped. At the same time a wireless report was made, which brought two other British destroyers to the spot at high speed. The "hunt" was continued by the three destroyers for several hours.

As is always the case when the taxpayers' money has been spent in unforeseen circumstances, a court of inquiry was held at Gibraltar to inquire into the incident. After examining all the circumstances, it was decided that no submarine attack had actually been made upon H.M.S. *Basilisk*. It was alleged that the detector had located a shoal of fish, and that the lookout had been misled by a trick of the light or the ruffle of a "line squall" on the surface of the water. In any event, the action taken by H.M.S. *Basilisk* was fully justified. It would have been madness to delay action when it was reported that two tons of metal and high explosive were rushing at the ship.

The Admiralty was seized with unaccustomed frankness. It issued a statement that no submarine attack on H.M.S. *Basilisk* had, in fact, taken place.

The Press of the whole world had been full of the alleged submarine attack on H.M.S. *Basilisk*, and confirmation of the counter-attacking action taken by the destroyers had actually been obtained from the British Admiralty. The Press reports had been embellished by the stories of watchers ashore, who had seen columns of smoke rising from the sea, and other phenomena associated in the minds of laymen with the destruction of a submerged submarine. There had even been statements made by members of the crews of the destroyers on their arrival at Gibraltar. These spoke of slowly spreading patches of oil and of bubbles rising from the depths. One statement said simply but positively, "We sank the submarine." Those words were blazoned on posters all over London.

The Admiralty denial of any attack came, therefore, as a great anticlimax. At first it was believed to be a "diplomatic denial," owing to discovery of evidence that

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

the sunken submarine belonged to a "friendly" Power. In engendering such a belief, even for a short time, the Admiralty statement did singular disservice to British diplomacy, which was straining every nerve to prevent strained relations from snapping.

The second reaction of the world to the denial that any attack had been made on H.M.S. *Basilisk* was damaging to the Royal Navy. It was considered that the British Navy had unintentionally perpetrated a gigantic hoax, and that this had been done because the officers and men of the Royal Navy were so nervous of submarine attack that they saw torpedoes and submarines in every wave.

Finally, the Admiralty statement wiped away much of the confidence felt among laymen in the secret but much-hinted-at submarine detecting and hunting devices of the British Navy. The picture of British destroyers of the latest type rushing about scattering depth-charges in an attempt to lay a ghost appealed neither to the imagination nor to the pockets of the taxpayer.

Denial of the submarine attack on H.M.S. *Basilisk*, and official statement that the submarine which had been so rigorously counter-attacked was a product of the imagination, tended, since it threw doubt upon the efficiency of even the British anti-piracy patrols, to reduce the deterrent effect of such patrols.

It also brought world-wide ridicule upon a Service which was performing all manner of tasks under difficult conditions. That this was brought about by action of an administration whose duty it was to guard the interests of the Navy was ironical.

There was another consideration. The Admiralty statement and its repercussions might well have led to a reduction in naval efficiency, and even to tragedy. Had a warship been attacked by a submarine soon after this incident, the tendency would have been to make sure before taking action – to court a delay which might well have proved fatal.

## CLEARING SHOWERS

From every point of view the Admiralty statement was a mistake. It led to much bitter comment within the Royal Navy, where it was well known that the personnel of H.M.S. *Basilisk* and of the other destroyers concerned in the "hunt" were quite convinced that a genuine submarine torpedo attack had taken place, and that the depth-charges had proved at least partially effective. The British Navy believed a report, received soon afterwards, of the arrival in port of a damaged submarine, the crew of which had been so severely "shaken up" that three members of its personnel were neurasthenic to the point almost of insanity.

There was, within the Admiralty itself, some argument as to the advisability of issuing any statement upon the *Basilisk* incident, but it was held by Mr. Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, that the proper and safest procedure was to make a clean breast of things. There was, apparently, fear that the truth would leak out and make the Admiralty look foolish. Honesty may be the best policy in most cases, but there is no denying that the Admiralty action made both itself and the Royal Navy look supremely ridiculous. If any inkling of the truth had leaked out it could only have come from the indiscretions of persons privy to the findings of the court of inquiry. Since a court of inquiry is private and its findings confidential, the risk was not great. Moreover, if any rumours had got about they would have been far easier to lay than belief in a situation which had been widely publicised throughout the world, and which had been supported by the accounts of eye-witnesses. Perhaps it was loyalty to the Admiralty which led to the general acceptance of its statement. There is no denying, however, that the theory that the Admiralty was the dupe of the Foreign Office persisted.

The "Nyon Arrangement" dealt only with the menace of submarine attacks upon merchant vessels in the Mediterranean. A parallel instrument designed to guard



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

against air attack was necessary. This was concluded a few days later; not at Nyon, but by the Nyon Conference, which remained in being at Geneva.

The difficulties of dealing with air attack on merchant ships are manifold. It is not too much to say that there can be no guarantee of counter-attack against aircraft unless all merchant vessels are grouped in convoys and escorted by warships with large anti-aircraft armaments. No navy, or combination of navies, of the present day could provide sufficient ships to patrol even the Mediterranean with such density that every aeroplane which could attack a merchant vessel should be counter-attacked by a warship. There is the question of establishing guilt, in a case where a warship does not actually see the attack and open fire on the aircraft immediately. Unlike the submarine, the aeroplane has a great advantage of speed over the counter-attacking sea forces. It is therefore impossible to prescribe an area of "certain guilt," or even of "probable guilt."

The problem of guarding merchant vessels in the Mediterranean against air attack was further complicated by the fact that such attacks were to be expected from both contestants in the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Nationalist aircraft, based on the south of Spain, the Balearic Islands, and Spanish Morocco, operated against shipping heading for the ports of republican Spain, in an attempt to strengthen the "blockade." But aircraft from the east coast of Spain also attacked ships.

It was not long before the anti-piracy patrols in the western basin of the Mediterranean were strengthened by the arrival of flying-boats. These carried out long-distance patrols and reconnaissance flights. The British flying-boats operated from Arzeu, near Oran, where the submarine depot ship, H.M.S. *Cyclops*, became temporarily a flying-boat base. The flying-boat patrols were directed against the piratical activities of submarines,

## CLEARING SHOWERS

but they exercised a certain deterrent effect also upon the piratical activities of aircraft.

Nevertheless, air attacks on ships continued, though with somewhat diminished frequency. On September 24th, 1937, it was reported that the British steamers *Hamsterley* and *Sheaf Spear* had been attacked by bombing aircraft. It was alleged that the attacking aircraft were of Italian type, but neither ship was hit. On October 8th the London-registered steamer *Cervantes* was bombed when thirteen miles off Tarragona, but was not hit. On October 21st the British steamer *Marvia* was bombed and machine-gunned from the air when fifty miles south-east of Barcelona. There were also several reports of air attacks on foreign merchant ships.

On October 30th there occurred a further air attack upon a British merchant ship. This was more important than the others because it resulted in the sinking of the ship, and because it was obviously deliberate.

The British steamer *Jean Weems*, registered at Gibraltar, was proceeding from Marseilles to Barcelona with a cargo of grain and hides when, at 7 a.m. on October 30th, a seaplane appeared and circled over the ship. The *Jean Weems* was flying the Red Ensign at the time. The seaplane, after circling round over the ship, disappeared in the direction of Majorca. An hour later it returned and signalled to the *Jean Weems* that she was to stop and that her crew were to take to the boats, as it was intended to sink the steamer. Five minutes were allowed for the crew to get clear of the ship. A few moments after the last boat had got clear of the ship the seaplane commenced bombing. The first bomb struck the *Jean Weems*. Altogether, sixteen bombs were dropped by the seaplane, four of which hit the steamer aft, and she sank within a quarter of an hour.

Here was an incident which demanded more than mere protest. It had obviously been planned and carried out in defiance of the British flag, and it seemed likely that,

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

after sighting and examining the ship, the seaplane had flown to the Balearic Islands for instructions. This argued deliberate attack at the instigation of the authorities – a very different matter from incidents which could, in part, be excused by mistaken identity or by the over-zealous conduct of aeroplane pilots.

Great Britain immediately consulted with France, as the joint convener of the Nyon Conference, with a view to strengthening the precautions against air attack on merchant ships. At the same time a show of British naval force was staged in the north-western waters of the Mediterranean. H.M.S. *Hood*, the flagship of Vice-Admiral A. B. Cunningham, commanding the battle cruiser squadron, became much in evidence in those waters. She visited the Balearic Islands, and then went to Barcelona. This latter visit was made ostensibly in order to ascertain the full circumstances of the sinking of the *Jean Weems* from the survivors of that ship. The British Consul-General at Barcelona had, however, already been instructed by the Foreign Office to conduct an inquiry and forward a full report.

In January 1938 came news of the sinking of the first neutral merchant vessel to be attacked by submarine since the signing of the Nyon anti-piracy pact. The Dutch steamer *Hannah* was bound from Gibraltar to Valencia with a cargo of beans and wheat when she was attacked. The attack took place seven miles off Cape San Antonio. The *Hannah* was sunk by a torpedo, but all the crew were rescued.

At the end of January came news of another sinking. The British steamer *Endymion* had left Gibraltar on January 29th for Cartagena. The ship had on board a Swedish "non-intervention observer." At 1.20 p.m. on January 31st, when sixteen miles off the coast, the ship was torpedoed by a submarine and sank in four minutes. Of the fifteen persons on board eleven were lost, including

## CLEARING SHOWERS

the captain and his wife. The cargo carried by the ship consisted of 920 tons of coke.

Four days later the British steamer *Alicia* was sunk by aircraft after five minutes' notice when twenty-two miles east of Barcelona.

It was immediately obvious that the measures taken as the result of the Nyon Conference were losing their grip of the situation. The patrols instituted as a result of that conference had been reduced in order to allow of leave being given to personnel at the end of the year. Conversations were held in London as a result of which the patrols were again strengthened, and again the activities of submarines and aircraft ceased.

In this case the submarine problem was very different from that which had faced the Nyon Conference of September 1937. At that date submarine activity had been reported from widely different areas. In February 1938, however, it was obvious that only a few submarines were concerned and that these were working from the Balearic Islands. The strengthening of the patrols and the stricter orders for the sinking of any submarine met with amounted to a "non-intervention" blockade of the Balearic Islands.

But in spite of the sinking of these ships the efforts of the British, French, and Italian navies had made the Mediterranean as a whole safer for shipping.

Proof of this lies in its recognition by that organisation so sensitive to danger to shipping – the marine insurance market. In the middle of November 1936 the war-risk insurance rates on cargo carried in the Spanish danger zone of the Mediterranean were reduced, and they have not been again increased. The rates of premium for war-risk insurance of cargoes in all vessels except oil tankers were reduced to five shillings per cent. Even before this reduction the rate was low, a fact which reflected the protection given to ships in the Mediterranean by the naval forces. The Mediterranean rate had been

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

seven and sixpence per cent, while that for cargoes at Shanghai during the first weeks of the Sino-Japanese conflict was twenty shillings per cent.

The one danger to shipping which could not be dealt with by patrolling naval forces was that from mines. This showed signs of increase late in 1936. Franco's "blockade" by air and by submarine was showing signs of failure. The nationalists therefore fell back upon increased minelaying off the republican coast.

On November 7th a warning was issued from Salamanca that minelaying between Cape San Antonio and Cape Tortosa would be intensified. These capes are the limits of the Gulf of Valencia, a shallow indentation in the east coast, a hundred and twenty miles across. This warning was passed on to British shipping by the Admiralty in the form of a "Notice to Mariners." Again a few weeks later mining operations were intensified, and on December 16th, 1937, the Admiralty issued a further warning to shipping. This informed British vessels that they entered Spanish territorial waters at considerable risk. It went on to state that reports had been received that moored mines might exist to seaward for a distance of ten miles from the coast. This warning seemed to lend confirmation to the belief that the mine which had caused the damage to H.M.S. *Hunter* seven months before was moored outside territorial waters, and not a drifting mine which had broken away from its moorings.

Yet another duty of the Royal Navy was to see that British merchant vessels did not carry arms to Spain. This had been made illegal under the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Munitions to Spain) Act of 1936. Several ships were stopped by British warships and taken into Gibraltar for examination. Among them was the British steamer *Euphorbia*. This ship was bound from the Black Sea to one of the ports on the east coast of Spain in circumstances which excited suspicion of illegal trading

## CLEARING SHOWERS

in munitions. She was intercepted and stopped by the cruiser H.M.S. *Galatea*, flagship of Vice-Admiral J. F. Somerville, Commanding the Mediterranean destroyer flotillas, and sent into Gibraltar under escort of the destroyer H.M.S. *Hasty*. Another British ship, the S.S. *African Mariner*, was taken into Malta for examination by the destroyer H.M.S. *Greyhound*. No contraband was found, and the ship was released some ten days later.

Interception and arrest of British ships by British warships naturally caused some annoyance to British shipowners. It was necessary, however, that the law should be observed. Moreover, it gave the British Navy a very powerful weapon when protesting that the naval forces of neither of the contestants in Spain should stop or interfere with British shipping on the high seas. Had Great Britain taken her stand upon no interference with British shipping, and given no demonstration that she herself proposed to be responsible that British ships did not carry arms to Spain, she would have been open to a charge of infringing the spirit of non-intervention. There would also have been direct encouragement for every gun-runner to sail under the British flag.

At the beginning of November 1937 the forces of General Franco gained control of the whole of the Biscayan coast. With the disappearance of warring factions in that area, and of the "blockade," the need for naval protection to British shipping off the north coast disappeared. Thankfully, the Admiralty gave up one of its most unwelcome commitments and withdrew the cruiser H.M.S. *Southampton* and the destroyers which had been on duty in that area.

That the commitments of the British Navy off the north coast of Spain were unwelcome, and were thankfully relinquished, was not due to any reluctance to protect British shipping, in whatsoever quarter it might be threatened. It was due to what *The Times* called "a flood of strident criticism" which had been directed against the

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

actions of naval officers in that area by both political extremes, at home as well as abroad.

The British men-of-war off the Biscay coast, as was their plain duty, passed to merchant vessels the latest information regarding the dangers of entry into Spanish territorial waters. There were not lacking, however, persons who affected to know far more about these dangers than the men on the spot. It was even insinuated that a British admiral, actuated by sympathy with General Franco, had magnified the dangers of entry into the Basque ports in order to dissuade merchant vessels from taking supplies to them.

At the other extreme, General Franco went so far as to complain that the loss, through striking one of his own mines, of the battleship *España* was the direct result of British naval action in interfering with the stopping of merchant vessels on the high seas. "The plain fact is," wrote *The Times*, "that the British Navy has acted throughout with complete impartiality, commendable restraint, and a full sense of the grave responsibility laid upon it in a series of delicate situations."

On March 6th the Madrid Government endeavoured to regain sea power. A force of cruisers and destroyers intercepted three of General Franco's cruisers at night. Torpedoes were fired and one of these hit the *Baleares*, which caught fire. The British destroyers *Boreas* and *Kempenfelt*, which were on Nyon patrol duties in the vicinity, rushed to the spot to save lives. More than 100 Spaniards were saved by these ships, in spite of bombing attacks from aircraft finishing off the crippled cruiser. One of these bombs killed Able-seaman George G. Long, of H.M.S. *Boreas*, and wounded three other British seamen.

The full story of the later stages of the Spanish Civil War, and of the tasks which they imposed upon the British Navy, cannot yet be written. The war drags on.

The naval experience gained in recent years in the

## CLEARING SHOWERS

Mediterranean, and the training in initiative which has resulted, have been of great value; but all through the long months fleet and flotilla training have had to be so subordinated to other requirements.

One thing may be said for certain. The Royal Navy during the Spanish Civil War has demonstrated to the whole world the wider aspects of sea-power. Sea-power means more than the marshalling of fleets and squadrons and their use in war. The destroyer that steams a hundred miles to rescue one British subject; the battle cruiser that dashes off to secure the safe passage of a small steamship "upon its lawful occasions"; the cruiser that waits for long weeks in a harbour turbulent with shooting and bombing in order to be a refuge for the helpless and homeless of every nation – these represent a Navy that makes of sea-power something more than solely a nation's first line of defence.

Mr. Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, when he returned at the end of October 1937 from a tour of inspection in the Mediterranean on board H.M.S. *Enchantress*, made the following signal to Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean:

"On my return from the Mediterranean I wish to thank you and those serving under you for the welcome that I received there.

"I was deeply impressed by the devotion to duty and the cheerful efficiency that animate all officers and men.

"The difficult and onerous task that has been imposed upon the Royal Navy during the past year has been carried out in a manner that has earned the admiration of their fellow countrymen and of the world."

That signal was neither "hot air" nor undeserved "chocolate."



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE OPEN ROAD

The Mediterranean situation reviewed – can England hold it? – trade and Empire defence strategy – Italy's hostages

THE TWO DECADES which have passed since the later stages of the Great War have altered the whole face of the Mediterranean. Only one factor remains unchanged. The Mediterranean still forms the British Empire's greatest trade artery. To what extent has this factor been affected by changes in and around the Mediterranean? Can the British Empire retain the security of the great trade route, or of the fortresses which guard it?

Those are questions which have agitated, and continue to agitate, the best brains of the day. They are questions which have been debated in Parliament and public-house; at club fenders and at dinner-tables; by statesmen and strategists, both professional and amateur. Small wonder. Upon the answers depends the existence of the greatest Empire the world has ever seen.

Free passage of the middle sea is free passage of the greatest of the arteries of Empire. But is it vital to the continuation of that Empire? A British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs has said that it is vital. It is a sweeping statement, and needs important qualification.

The British Empire could not continue to exist if its trade with all the lands bordering the Indian Ocean were cut. The following figures speak for themselves. They are the percentages of the various imports to Great Britain which passed through the Suez Canal during the year 1936:

## THE OPEN ROAD

Meat, 30 per cent.  
Cheese and Butter, 63 per cent.  
Wheat, Barley, and Rice, 42 per cent.  
Tea, 97 per cent.  
Sugar, 34 per cent.  
Manganese, Tin, Copper, and Lead, 62 per cent.  
Rubber, 94 per cent.  
Wool, 75 per cent.  
Cotton, 37 per cent.  
Petroleum, 25 per cent.  
Jute and Hemp, 90 per cent.

It is obvious that alternative sources of supply for all these commodities could not be found in emergency. It is also evident that, if Great Britain were prevented from securing these large proportions of her essential imports, she would not be able to support her population. Nor would she be able to defend herself.

The British Empire is, however, fortunately placed. Alternative sources of essential supply may not be available, but an alternative route to these sources of supply is available. This is the route to the Indian Ocean by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Were the line of communication through the Mediterranean cut, the alternative route round the Cape of Good Hope would have to be adopted. South Africa would then become a defence and bunkering station of the first importance – and the Union of South Africa is a partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

It would, therefore, seem to be an exaggeration to describe the safety of the Mediterranean trade route as "vital." During part of the Great War practically the whole of the British eastern trade was diverted round the Cape of Good Hope owing to the activities of German submarines in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, this diversion of trade is to be avoided. It can only be visualised as a last resort, because of the great increase

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

in the length of voyages which it would involve. Increased length of voyage means that ships will be longer in transit. It will therefore take a great many more ships to keep up the steady flow of trade. The greater the number of merchant ships at sea in wartime, the greater the naval protection required. Two questions, therefore, emerge. Has the British Empire got at its disposal a sufficient number of merchant vessels to enable a steady and sufficient flow of trade to be kept up over the longer route? And is the British Navy in a position to give to these freight-carriers the protection which is their due? If either of these questions has to be answered in the negative, the route round the Cape of Good Hope ceases to be a practical alternative. The Mediterranean trade route then becomes truly vital.

Lloyd's Register for 1937 gives the total strength of the British mercantile marine as 9,711 vessels, totalling 20,629,509 gross tons. These are formidable figures. But there are others just as formidable. The feeding of the population of Great Britain requires the *daily* importation of more than 50,000 tons of foodstuffs. This means that an average of 150 ships must arrive in our ports every day in the year. And these arrivals make no provision for the importation of raw materials or manufactured goods. In 1936 the Admiralty carried out a census of British shipping. It was found that, on March 7th, 1936, there were at sea 1,462 British merchant vessels of 3,000 tons and over. On the same date there were loading or unloading in ports all over the world 852 British merchant vessels of 3,000 tons and over. The figures given in Lloyd's Register include British merchant vessels of less than 3,000 tons. There are over 600 British ships with a tonnage between 2,000 and 3,000, and many hundreds of ships with a less tonnage than 2,000.

The maintenance of oil supplies must always exercise the attention of those in charge of Empire strategy. So

## THE OPEN ROAD

far as the Mediterranean is concerned, we need only consider one quarter of the total British imports of petroleum. By far the largest part of this quarter – 23 per cent, to be exact – comes from the oil fields of Iran. Before 1935 all this oil was shipped at the head of the Persian Gulf and passed through the Suez Canal. In the spring of 1935 the oil pipe line from the Mosul oil fields to the Mediterranean coast was completed. This almost halved the length of the tanker voyage to England. By so doing it reduced the number of tankers required to provide the necessary supply for England. There was a fear that economic forces would lead to a reduction in the number of British tankers, so that, if emergency made it necessary to revert to loading at the head of the Persian Gulf and to divert traffic round the Cape of Good Hope, there would be insufficient tankers to maintain the essential supply.

This danger was offset by the Admiralty, which ordered six large tankers in the same year, and which now has twelve tankers building to its order. Whitehall does not always sleep so soundly as some people would have one believe.

It is clear that, from the point of view of Empire trade, the Mediterranean route is not absolutely vital. On the other hand, closure of this route would certainly involve a dislocation of trade which would prove most serious.

Military and naval requirements, however, make free passage of the Mediterranean absolutely vital.

The military requirements are no less important because the reason for them lies far from the Mediterranean. Great Britain would be in sore straits if the southern coast of the English Channel fell into enemy hands. Tens of thousands died to keep the Germans out of the Channel ports during the Great War. The safety of the ports on the south side of the English Channel rests, in the first instance, upon the French Army. The

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

strength of the French Army depends upon the free passage of reinforcements across the Mediterranean, from the vast reservoir of man-power in French North Africa, to Marseilles.

It is not too much to say that the whole fabric of Empire naval defence rests upon the ability of British warships to pass through the Mediterranean.

At present there is war in the Far East. Japan is showing herself a nation with scant respect for the rights of foreigners. There is no telling to what lengths Japanese ambition may go. Malaya is valuable. Australia and New Zealand may in time be threatened. A Japanese naval officer has written books proving, by oriental logic, that Japan and the British Empire must sooner or later come into armed conflict.

The great British naval base at Singapore was formally opened on February 14th, 1938. The completion of the base sees an immense strengthening in the defensive position of the British Empire. But a naval base is not of much use without a fleet. Where is Singapore's fleet to come from should emergency arise? From the Mediterranean.

That is the strategy of to-day. In a few years the battleship strength of the Royal Navy will have been materially increased. Then the long-prepared system of Empire defence will be completed. There will be three main fleets. One will be in home waters. One will be in the East. The third will be in the Mediterranean – not in order to menace or annoy Mussolini or anybody else, but because the Mediterranean is the strategic centre. From the centre, reinforcements could be quickly sent to either flank if they were threatened. Similarly, the flanks could, if need be, reinforce the centre; as was, in fact, done during the emergency arising out of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute. The Mediterranean must remain the open road of Empire strategy.

But can Great Britain keep open that sea road? Will

## THE OPEN ROAD

not Mussolini succeed in making the Mediterranean into a *mare clausum*? Six times in the history of England has the British Navy stood between a would-be master of Europe and the attainment of his ambition. Charlemagne, Charles V, Philip II of Spain, Louis XIV of France, Napoleon, Wilhelm II of Prussia — all aspired to world dominion, and all were checked by British sea-power. Should Mussolini lose his head, it seems probable that history would repeat itself and that he would join the distinguished company.

That Mussolini is in an immensely strong position there is no denying. His Navy is strong, and he is adding to its strength. The Italian air force is strong. Mussolini is at the head of a nation organised on a war footing. In October 1937 he spoke at Bologna of holding out to the world an olive-branch which "springs from an immense forest of eight million bayonets, well sharpened and thrust from intrepid young hearts."

Strategically, too, there is much of strength in Mussolini's position. Italy and Sicily cut the Mediterranean almost in half. In the centre of the narrow channel between Sicily and Africa, Mussolini is fortifying the island of Pantellaria. In the east, the Dodecanese are in a position to dominate the Ægean and offer a threat to Palestine, Egypt, and the Suez Canal. In the west — what? No man can tell what will be the outcome of Italian assistance to the forces of General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Italian forces appear, however, to be firmly ensconced in the Balearic Islands, which dominate France's vital military trade route to North Africa. It is also held in many quarters that a victory for the Spanish Nationalists would make Gibraltar untenable and see Germany or Italy in occupation of part of Spanish Morocco, the Rio de Oro, and the Canary Islands. Of these the most to be feared is German occupation of the Rio de Oro or the Canary Islands, both of which are, strategically, in a position to dominate a large section of the trade routes

## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

from Great Britain to South Africa and South America.

One factor of Imperial defence which has exercised British opinion has been the defensibility or otherwise of Gibraltar. This was brought to a head by statements made in the House of Commons by Mr. Winston Churchill, who quoted as his authority Mr. Randolph Churchill, who had recently returned from the vicinity. As a result of these statements the headline "Guns over Gibraltar" became, in Great Britain, a sort of sub-title to the Spanish Civil War.

Gibraltar is Great Britain's guardian of the western entrance to the Mediterranean. The Rock has long been considered an impregnable fortress. During 1936, however, many British people began to question its impregnability. There was the much-publicised presence of heavy guns in the vicinity. There followed a proposal, made by a British vice-admiral on the retired list, that the British Empire should exchange Gibraltar for Ceuta. The admiral was a one-time Director of Naval Intelligence. One would hesitate to question his judgment were it not for two things. He was certainly not voicing the considered opinion of the Admiralty or the Imperial General Staff. In a debate in the House of Lords on November 3rd, 1936, it appeared that the idea of moving to Ceuta was not original. In that debate Lord Strabolgi (formerly Commander Kenworthy) said that, when serving at Gibraltar in 1916, he had drafted a memorandum in which he had suggested that "we should take the opportunity of the general settlement after the war to negotiate a friendly arrangement with the Spanish Government for the exchange of Gibraltar, and that we should take Ceuta, on the other side, instead."

Replying, in the same debate, on behalf of the Government, the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava said that Lord Strabolgi took too much for granted in thinking that Gibraltar was untenable. There was, he said, great difference of opinion between the experts on that matter,

## THE OPEN ROAD

but they were agreed that, if circumstances arose in which Gibraltar was untenable, then the proposed alternative would be equally untenable.

The plain facts with regard to Gibraltar are that the defences had been allowed to decay for several years prior to 1935. But in that year new defences were pushed forward in positions which made their destruction by an enemy virtually impossible. Of all British colonies, Gibraltar, by reason of its configuration and the meteorological conditions over the Rock, is the least susceptible to air attack. In the event of a definite threat to Gibraltar, it would be the surrounding country, rather than the Rock, which would be worthy of sympathy. The lack of an aerodrome at Gibraltar may be discounted. Catapult launching of aircraft is making tremendous strides. Besides, the Royal Navy has five efficient aircraft carriers in service, and a further five under construction. Gibraltar is likely to be far more of an anxiety to an enemy of the British Empire than to the British Empire itself.

Malta suffers from being close to Sicily, and therefore within easy range of Italian air attack. The defences have, however, been rapidly improved in the last few years. Officers who have recently returned from Malta state positively that the island can give as good as it gets. It must be remembered, also, that air attack, however damaging, cannot annex territory.

In discussing Malta, one must take notice of Pantellaria, Mussolini's newly fortified island in the Malta channel. If it were possible to say of any island that it would be untenable in time of war, one should be able to say it of Pantellaria. Nothing more than a volcanic rock, with bad harbours and a very scanty water supply, Pantellaria is within comfortable bombing range of aircraft from Malta and from the French Tunisian naval and air base of Bizerta.

In the Eastern Mediterranean the position is not so clear. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty allows Great Britain



## THE GREY DIPLOMATISTS

to maintain forces in Egypt for eight years only. In Palestine the mandate system is in the melting-pot. The British Government denies that any efforts are being made, or will be made, to convert Cyprus into the large naval and air base for which its strategical position seems to fit it. One thing, however, can be predicted with certainty. Unless the British Empire is overcome by supreme decadence it will never relax its grip upon either the Suez Canal or the oil pipe line terminal at Haifa.

There is an interesting reverse to the picture of Great Britain's grip upon the Mediterranean. Italy is in a strong position, but Mussolini has acted in a way which has given to Great Britain hostages of good behaviour. It has been said in the House of Lords that "the Italian strategical situation in the event of a major war is extraordinarily weak, because she has three large armies in Spain, Abyssinia, and Libya. These represent half a million hostages to fortune, and, but for a naval miracle, those forces would be instantly and irrevocably cut off."

One may not go the whole way with the noble lord. It is difficult to imagine Mussolini risking his all for the "volunteers" in Spain. There is, however, much truth in his words. Mussolini derives, in Italy, strength and power from the "new Roman Empire." He must know that to fly in the face of the British Empire would be to write "Finis" to his new empire. Even supposing that Italy could close the Mediterranean to British shipping for a few months, this would require Italy's whole effort, while it would take little effort on the part of the British Empire to close the approaches to the Mediterranean, and in particular to cut off Italy from her new "East African Empire." Wars are not won so much by effort as by adherence to the principle of "economy of effort."

So far as it is possible to pronounce any judgment upon the Mediterranean situation of to-day, one must admit that the position of the British Empire is strong – and getting stronger month by month under the gigantic

## THE OPEN ROAD

rearmament programme. In 1937 more cruisers were completed for the Royal Navy than in any year since the Great War. In 1938 more British destroyers will be completed than in any year since 1918; 1940 will see the completion of new battleships.

Italy, since she has acquired an East African Empire, has greater reason for friendship with Great Britain than ever before. Mussolini seems to have realised this, for it was he who made the overtures for the Anglo-Italian talks which led to the political crisis of February 1938 and the resignation of Mr. Anthony Eden.

On November 24th, 1937, Count Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London, was present at a dinner given to Italian ex-service men by the British Legion. Replying to the toast of "Italian Ex-Service Men," Count Grandi said that, when Great Britain and Italy at last decided to clear the way for understanding, they would discover that there was no real cause of mistrust or shadow between them, and they would no doubt regret having lost so much time in restoring their mutual trust and confidence.

Count Grandi is one of the ablest Ambassadors ever produced by Italy. Is it too much to hope that he may figure as a true prophet?



## INDEX

- ABBAS II, KHEDIVE**, 29  
**Abukir**, 177  
**Abyssinia**, 121-3, 126, 128-30, 133-5,  
 140-1, 143-4, 157, 166, 181, 194-6,  
 198, 202-3, 320  
**Acasta**, H.M.S., 109  
**Achates**, H.M.S., 109  
**Acre**, 214-16  
**Addis Ababa**, 122, 140, 181, 202  
**Aden**, 139, 154-5, 177, 179, 187,  
 193, 199  
**Admiralty**, 26-7, 93-4, 97, 99, 100,  
 106, 113, 127-8, 142, 149-51,  
 154, 156, 163, 165-7, 173, 180-1,  
 184-5, 187, 190, 251, 271, 275-6,  
 289, 297, 301-3, 308-9, 311, 314-  
 15, 318  
**Adrianople**, 66  
**Adriatic**, 35, 43, 81-2, 86-7, 94  
**Adventure**, H.M.S., 145, 179, 207  
**Afghanistan**, 77  
**Afium Karahissar**, 42  
**African Mariner**, S.S., 309  
**Air Ministry**, 113, 149, 156, 176  
**Ajax**, H.M.S. (battleship), 38, 48, 86  
**Ajax**, H.M.S. (cruiser), 153  
**Albania**, 81-2  
**Alcira**, S.S., 307  
**Alexandria**, 22, 29-30, 103, 152-3,  
 158, 160, 173-8, 182-3, 189-92,  
 196-7, 199-201, 205, 222, 224,  
 227, 232  
**Alicante**, 240, 265  
**Allenby**, Lord, 29, 41  
**Almeria**, 266, 275, 277, 281, 287  
**Almirante Cervera**, 258, 262, 270, 293  
**Amria**, 176  
**Ancona**, 164  
**Angora**, 37, 65, 76-7, 81  
**Anthony**, H.M.S., 249, 253, 261  
**Antioch**, S.S., 46  
**Arethusa**, H.M.S., 145, 213, 216-17,  
 220, 227, 277  
**Arzeu**, 304  
**Assab**, 196  
**Athens**, 88  
**Atlantic Fleet**, 57, 73, 79, 87, 106  
**Audace**, 89  
**Ausonia**, S.S., 196-7  
**Australia**, H.M.A.S., 130, 156  
**B.1**, 293  
**B.6**, 261, 293  
**Bab el Mandeb, Straits of**, 137, 149,  
 179  
**Backhouse**, Admiral Sir Roger, 172  
**Badoglio**, Marshal, 181, 195-6, 202  
**Bailey**, Admiral S. R., 99  
**Balbo**, Marshal, 135, 138, 149  
**Baldwin**, Rt. Hon. Stanley, 93, 114,  
 131-2, 170, 202  
**Baleares**, 310  
**Balearic Islands** (*see also* Majorca,  
 Iviza), 259, 265, 280, 284, 304,  
 306-7, 317  
**Balfour Committee and Declaration**,  
 32, 113, 204  
**Barcelona**, 232, 235, 237, 239-40,  
 242, 245, 248-9, 288, 305-7  
**Barham**, H.M.S., 153, 299  
**Bari**, 164  
**Barnacle**, Bandmaster, 102  
**Barthou**, M., 121  
**Barton**, Sir Sydney, 202  
**Basilisk**, H.M.S., 300-3  
**Basque coast, etc.**, 231, 254, 258,  
 261, 263, 266-7, 279  
**Batoum**, 58  
**Beatty**, Lord, 26, 104, 166-7  
**Bellerophon**, S.S., 156  
**Benbow**, H.M.S., 38, 60, 86  
**Benicarlo**, 288  
**Berbera**, 152  
**Berell**, Mr. R. L., 143  
**Bernotti**, Admiral, 299  
**Berwick**, H.M.S., 153  
**Bigha**, 56, 61  
**Bilbao**, 267, 269, 286  
**Bizerta**, 299, 319  
**Blanche**, H.M.S., 270-1  
**Blery**, Admiral, 299  
**Blue Shadow**, 258  
**Boreas**, H.M.S., 310  
**Bosphorus**, 14-15, 36, 38, 58-60,  
 76-7, 80  
**Brasen**, H.M.S., 270-1  
**British Corporal**, S.S., 287-8  
**Brock**, Admiral Sir Osmond (now  
 Admiral of the Fleet), 24, 26-33,  
 35-6, 38, 41-4, 51-2, 56, 62, 71,  
 74, 101

# INDEX

*Bryony*, H.M.S., 103  
*Bufs*, The, 78  
*Buizo*, Lieutenant-Commander, 260

C.1, 293  
 C.2, 293  
 C.3, 293  
 C.4, 293  
*Cadiz*, 293  
*Cairo*, 141-2  
*Calypso*, H.M.S., 76  
 Camel Corps, 193  
 Cameron Highlanders, 223  
 Campbell-Black, Mr. T., 142  
*Canarias*, 261-2, 270  
 Canary Islands, 230, 317  
*Capetown*, H.M.S., 202  
*Cardiff*, H.M.S., 48, 88  
 Carmel, Mount, 178, 216  
*Carpio*, S.S., 288, 291, 294  
*Cartagena*, 256, 263, 291-3, 306  
*Carysfort*, H.M.S., 65  
 Caslon, Commander, 271  
 Catalonia, 264, 280, 287  
 Cavagnari, Admiral, 160  
*Centurion*, H.M.S., 38  
*Cervantes*, S.S., 305  
 Ceuta, 318  
 Chamberlain, Rt. Hon. Neville, 144, 181, 203  
 Chanak, 22, 56-7, 59, 61-3, 86-7  
 Chan Bazarkeui, 61  
 Charpy, General, 62, 64  
 Chatalja Lines, 37-9, 41  
 Chatfield, Lord, 268, 297  
 Churchill, Rt. Hon. Winston, 318  
 Claridge's Fleet Club, 189-92  
 Clayton, Rev. P. B., 190  
 Clifford, Colonel, 81  
*Clyde*, H.M.S., 222  
*Codrington*, H.M.S., 259  
 Coldstream Guards, 57  
 Collard, Rear-Admiral B. St. G., 102  
*Colombo*, H.M.S., 152, 179  
*Comus*, H.M.S., 80  
 Conati, Lieutenantant, 82  
*Condotieri*, 164  
 Constantine, 46  
 Constantinople, 13-22, 36-41, 55, 59, 62-6, 70-2, 75-6, 78-80, 103  
*Conte di Cavour*, 88  
 Corfu, 84-92, 95  
*Courageous*, H.M.S., 103, 127, 151-2, 175  
*Coventry*, H.M.S., 130, 169-70  
*Craigend*, S.S., 266

*Crete*, 109, 115-16  
 Cunningham, Vice-Admiral A. B., 306  
*Curacoa*, H.M.S., 75  
*Curlew*, H.M.S., 169-70  
 Curzon, Rt. Hon. Lord, 64  
*Cyclops*, H.M.S., 214, 222, 304  
 Cyprus, 33, 47, 107-12, 140, 179, 320

*Daily Mail*, 102  
*Daily Telegraph*, 292-3  
 Dalmatia, 81  
 Daniel, Commander H. M., 102  
 D'Annunzio, 94  
 Danube, 87, 96, 119  
 Dardanelles, 14, 22, 42, 55-8, 60, 62, 64, 74, 76, 79  
 De Bono, General, 126, 140-1, 149, 195-6, 197  
*Dee*, H.M.S., 165  
*Defender*, H.M.S., 153, 185  
*Delhi*, H.M.S., 207, 227  
 De Robeck, Admiral Sir John, 15, 20-5, 27  
*Deutschland*, 280-1, 283, 285  
*Devonshire*, H.M.S., 116-17, 130, 235, 238  
 Dewar, Captain K. G. B., 102  
*Diligence*, H.M.S., 39  
*Diomede*, H.M.S., 156  
*Djebel Amour*, S.S., 287  
 Dodecanese, 125, 173, 295, 317  
 Dominion, Count Caccia, 120  
 Domville, Admiral Sir Barry, 52, 98  
*Douglas*, H.M.S., 162, 249  
 Drew, Captain T. B., 266  
 Duff Cooper, Rt. Hon., 303, 311  
 Duff, Mr. Douglas, 174, 212  
 Dufferin and Ava, Marquess of, 318  
 Duke of Gloucester, H.R.H. the, 156  
*Dunkerque*, 123  
*Durban*, H.M.S., 207, 211-12, 227

*Eagle*, H.M.S., 127, 145  
 Eden, Rt. Hon. Anthony, 150, 157, 202, 278, 297-8, 300, 312, 321  
*Edgar Quinet*, 48  
*Egypt*, S.S., 78  
*Ehaterinoslav*, S.S., 78  
*Electra*, H.M.S., 254  
*Elpiniki*, S.S., 46  
*Emerald*, H.M.S., 153  
*Emmanuele Filiberto Duca D'Aosta*, 164  
*Enchantress*, H.M.S., 311

# INDEX

- Endymion*, S.S., 306  
*Enterprise*, H.M.S., 202  
*Epirus*, 82  
*Eritrea*, 123-4, 126, 135, 140-1, 144,  
 147, 149, 157, 183  
*Ernest Renan*, 48  
*Escort*, H.M.S., 254-5  
*Esdraelon*, Plain of, 216, 228  
*Esk*, H.M.S., 254-5  
*España*, 266-7, 276, 310  
*Esteva*, Admiral, 299  
*Euphorbia*, S.S., 308  
*Euterpe*, S.S., 53  
*Exeter*, H.M.S., 153  
*Exmouth*, H.M.S., 254-5  
*Ezine*, 56  
  
**FAMAGUSTA**, 109  
*Faulknor*, H.M.S., 266  
*Ferrol*, 256, 261-2  
*Field*, Admiral Sir Frederick (now  
 Admiral of the Fleet), 103  
*Fisher*, Admiral Sir William, 115,  
 117, 126-8, 130, 145-8, 162, 171,  
 173, 179, 183, 186, 190, 198, 200  
*Fiume*, 81-2, 94  
*Fleet Air Arm*, 113, 160, 168, 175-7  
*Foreign Office*, 303, 306  
*Franchetti*, Baron, 140-1  
*Franco*, General, 230, 235, 248, 254,  
 256-8, 261-3, 265-7, 270, 274,  
 278-80, 284-5, 287-8, 292-5, 308-  
 10, 317  
*Franklin-Bouillon*, M., 64  
*Freeman*, Lieutenant-Commander,  
 A. R., 190  
*Frunze*, General Michael, 54  
*Fuad*, King, 30  
  
*Galatea*, H.M.S., 260, 309  
*Galilee*, Sea of, 223, 227  
*Gallant*, H.M.S., 265  
*Gallipoli*, 14, 21, 41, 60  
*Garry*, H.M.S., 165  
*General Election*, 93, 133, 197  
*Georgios Averoff*, 89, 115-16  
*Gibel Zerkon*, S.S., 259-61  
*Gibraltar*, 87, 137, 145-6, 149, 151-2,  
 155, 158, 171, 173, 183, 188,  
 237, 256-9, 262, 264, 277, 293,  
 301, 305-6, 308-9, 317-19  
*Gijon*, 254, 258, 261, 293  
*Gipsy*, H.M.S., 264  
*Giulio Cesare*, 88  
*Giuseppe Miraglia*, 183  
*Glorious*, H.M.S., 145-6, 175  
*Goeben*, 41-2  
  
*Good Hope*, Cape of, 313-15  
*Gordon Highlanders*, 259  
*Graham*, Sir Ronald, 91  
*Grandi*, Count, 321  
*Greyhound*, H.M.S., 309  
*Guardian*, H.M.S., 155  
*Gunther*, Mr. John, 193  
*Gwent hills*, S.S., 286  
  
*Habana*, S.S., 279-80  
*Hadjianestes*, General, 34, 43  
*Haifa*, 22, 33, 107, 126, 134, 173,  
 176-9, 182, 192, 199, 202, 207,  
 209-18, 221, 223-5, 227, 229, 320  
*Haile Selassie*, 202-3  
*Halcyon*, H.M.S., 164  
*Hampshire Regiment*, 228  
*Hamsterley*, S.S., 305  
*Hannah*, S.S., 306  
*Harington*, General Sir Charles, 62,  
 65, 71, 80  
*Hasty*, H.M.S., 309  
*Havock*, H.M.S., 264, 288-9, 291, 294  
*Heathcote-Smith*, Mr. C. E., 190  
*Hecuba*, S.S., 78  
*Heliopolis*, 141-2, 176  
*Helle*, 115  
*Henley*, Rear-Admiral J. W. C., 109  
*Hermes*, H.M.S., 153  
*Hiley*, Able-Seaman G. A., 266  
*Hitler*, 67, 96, 119-20, 129, 203  
*Hoare*, Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel, 143,  
 149-50, 170, 203, 228-9  
*Home Fleet*, 112, 127, 162, 172,  
 179, 182, 188  
*Hood*, H.M.S., 98, 127, 155, 306  
*Hughes*, Colonel, 42  
*Humphreys*, Lieutenant P. N., 276  
*Hunter*, H.M.S., 275-8, 308  
*Hussars*, Third, 78  
*Hussein Kemal*, 29  
  
**IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM**, 36, 169  
*Inskip*, Rt. Hon. Sir Thomas, 114  
*Invergordon*, 106, 248  
*Irish Guards*, 78  
*Iron Duke*, H.M.S., 15, 20, 22-4, 26,  
 28-30, 31, 36, 41, 43-4, 48, 62-3,  
 65, 71, 74-5, 78, 166, 170  
*Irun*, 254  
*Ismet Pasha*, 62, 65  
*Iviza*, 247, 251, 280  
  
*JAFFA*, 30-1, 206-8, 222, 224, 226  
*Jaima Primero*, 72  
*Janiina*, 82-3, 89, 117  
*Jarabub*, 120, 135

# INDEX

*Jean Bart*, 48  
*Jean Weems*, S.S., 305-6  
*Jellicoe*, Lord, 104, 166, 170  
*Jerusalem*, 31, 206, 226  
*Jezreel*, Valley of, 227-8  
*Jibuti*, 122, 202  
*Jones*, Marine Denis, 217  
*"Jordan Queen"*, 227-8  
*Juan Ferrandis*, 262  
*Juan Sebastian de Eleana*, 261  
*Jubaland*, 95  
*Junod*, Dr., 255

KARA BIGHA, 61  
*Karakhan*, 104  
*Karnak*, S.S., 53, 68  
*Kassala*, 135  
*Kaukab el Howa*, 212  
*Kemal*, Mustapha (now Atatürk),  
 13-14, 34, 37, 40-2, 48, 52, 54, 56,  
 58, 62, 65, 67, 69, 74, 80, 82, 157  
*Kempensfelt*, H.M.S., 310  
*Khartoum*, 135  
*Kilia Liman*, 60  
*Kilid Bahr*, 60  
*Kilhis*, 44, 52, 89  
*King George V*, H.M., 28, 101, 128,  
 130, 132, 144, 192  
*King George V*, H.M.S., 38, 44  
*King's Own Scottish Borderers*, 78  
*Kisimayu*, 196  
*Kition*, Bishop of, 108, 110-11  
*Kyron*, Mr., 108, 110

LAMB, SIR HARRY, 44, 52  
*Lampson*, Sir Miles, 142  
*Larnaca*, 109-10  
*Lausanne Conference*, 72, 74-7,  
 80-1, 87  
*Laval*, M., 121-2, 124, 126, 170, 194,  
 203  
*League of Nations*, 32, 85-6, 95,  
 118, 121-2, 129, 131, 133, 138,  
 142, 144, 148-50, 154, 157, 161,  
 178, 181, 184, 188, 194-5, 202-4,  
 273, 296  
*Leander*, H.M.S., 155  
*Leatham*, Rear-Admiral R., 173  
*Leipzig*, 281-5  
*Lemnos*, 44, 52  
*Leon*, 115  
*Lessona*, Signor, 195  
*Libya*, 95, 120-1, 134-5, 138, 149,  
 176-7, 320  
*Liffey*, H.M.S., 165  
*Limassol*, 22, 109  
*Lincolnshire Regiment*, 228

*Little*, Captain C. J. C. (now Vice-  
 Admiral Sir Charles), 53  
*Littorio*, 123  
*Litvinov*, M., 295, 297-8  
*Llandoverly Castle*, S.S., 264  
*Lloyd George*, Rt. Hon. D., 14, 34,  
 88  
*Lloyd*, Lord, 103  
*Lloyd's Register*, 314  
*London*, H.M.S., 109-10, 117, 130,  
 245  
*London*, Lord Mayor of, 84  
*London*, Naval Treaty, 1930, 104-6,  
 123-4, 163-4, 166, 170, 288, 299  
*London*, Secret Treaty, 1915, 34, 95,  
 120-1  
*Long*, Able-Seaman G. G., 310  
*Loyal Regiment*, 215  
*Lucia*, H.M.S., 154  
*Lydda*, 226

MACDONALD, RT. HON. RAMSAY,  
 104  
*Mackay*, H.M.S., 162  
*McMahon letter*, 32, 204  
*Madrid*, 231, 240, 242, 257, 274, 310  
*Maffey*, Sir John, 128-9  
*Maginot Line*, 284  
*Mahommed VI*, Sultan, 34, 40, 71  
*Maille Breze*, 264  
*Maine*, R.F.A., 239-41  
*Majorca*, 265, 305  
*Malaga*, 239, 260, 263, 293  
*Malaya*, H.M.S., 71  
*Malta*, 15, 22-3, 28, 47, 74, 86, 90-1,  
 101, 125, 134, 136, 139-40, 145-9,  
 152, 156, 158-60, 164, 172-3, 186,  
 191, 222, 232, 239-40, 309, 319  
*Manela*, S.S., 176  
*Manissa Line*, 47  
*Mar Cantabrico*, S.S., 269-70  
*Maritza Line*, 66  
*Marlborough*, H.M.S., 38  
*Marseilles*, 24, 28, 121, 234-7, 239-  
 40, 249, 253, 305, 316  
*Martelli*, Mr. 143, 195  
*Marvia*, S.S., 305  
*Massawa*, 124, 126, 196  
*Matruh*, 177  
*Melilla*, 259, 261  
*Metz*, 65  
*Miguel de Cervantes*, 259-60, 291-3  
*Mogadishu*, 124, 196  
*Mombelli*, General, 62, 64  
*Mongioia*, S.S., 287  
*Monsell*, Lord (formerly Sir Bolton  
 Eyres-Monsell), 127, 181

# INDEX

- Morning Post*, 184  
 Morocco, 230, 256-7, 259, 262-3, 304, 317  
 Mounsell, Lieutenant, 117  
 Mudania, 62-5, 67, 75  
 Mudros, 57  
*Mulhouse*, 89  
 Mussolini, 67, 83-5, 89-91, 95, 117, 119, 121-2, 124, 126, 128-30, 133-7, 140-4, 148, 158, 161, 181, 183, 193-7, 295, 316-17, 319-21  
 NABLUS, 221, 223-4  
 Naples, 126  
 Nasmith, Captain Dunbar- (now Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-), 36, 51  
 Navarino Bay, 140  
 Nazareth, 33, 212  
 Negro, Cape, 287  
*Nelson*, H.M.S., 172  
*Neuralia*, S.S., 156, 172  
*Nevassa*, S.S., 156  
 Newton House Club, 192, 213  
 New Zealand Division, 156, 183  
 Nicholson, Rear-Admiral Wilmot, 75  
*Noemijulia*, S.S., 286  
 Non-intervention, 273-5, 283-7, 295, 306-7, 309  
 Nyon, 296-300, 303-4, 306-7, 310  
*Oakgrove*, S.S., 279  
 Odessa, 34, 58  
 Oil pipe line, 25, 31, 107, 126, 177-8, 212, 315, 320  
 Oran, 281, 304  
 Otranto, 82, 84  
 PALERMO, 101  
 Palma (Majorca), 232, 235-6  
*Panay*, U.S.S., 115  
 Pantellaria, 317, 319  
 Paphos, 109  
 Paton, Rev. Charles, 190, 192  
 Peace Ballot, 132-3, 143  
 Peachey, Commander A. T. G. C., 266  
*Pegasus*, H.M.S., 38  
 Phaleron Bay, 88-9, 116  
 Piræus, 68-9, 88  
*Pittsburgh*, U.S.S., 72  
 Plumer, Lord, 91  
*Porpoise*, H.M.S., 179  
 Port Bardia, 135  
 Port Said, 22, 30, 86, 134, 153, 177, 199  
 Port Sudan, 135, 222  
 Port Tewfik, 222  
 Port Tigrani, 117  
 "Potato" Jones, 269  
 Pound, Admiral Sir Dudley, 186, 299, 311  
*President IV*, H.M.S., 173-4  
 Prevesa, 88-9  
*Psara*, 115  
*Queen Elizabeth*, H.M.S., 103, 115, 117, 126, 130, 145, 150, 185, 198, 201  
 RAFET PASHA, 69-71  
*Ramillies*, H.M.S., 130  
*Renown*, H.M.S., 98-9, 127, 155  
*Repulse*, H.M.S., 127, 235-6, 259  
*Resolution*, H.M.S., 75, 103, 130, 145  
*Resource*, H.M.S., 234  
*Revenge*, H.M.S., 130  
 Rhodes, 125, 134, 173  
 Rifle Brigade, 57  
 Rio de Oro, 317  
 Robinson, Surgeon-Lieutenant, 117  
*Rodney*, H.M.S., 172  
 Rodosto, 63  
 Rome, 91, 95, 121, 126, 140-1, 155, 197, 284  
*Rowena*, H.M.S., 162  
 Royal Air Force, 112, 141, 149, 176-7, 193, 218  
 Royal Army Service Corps, 78, 221  
 Royal Artillery, 78, 223, 224  
 Royal Australian Navy, 105, 156, 183, 213  
 Royal Engineers, 78, 224  
 Royal Fusiliers, 57  
 Royal Naval Reserve, 165, 207, 218, 229  
*Royal Oak*, H.M.S., 101-2, 258, 265-6  
*Royal Sovereign*, H.M.S., 77, 87, 115, 117, 130, 166  
 Royal Sussex Regiment, 78  
 Rumbold, Sir Horace, 27, 35, 69, 72  
 Ruzza, Signor, 141  
 ST. JEAN DE LUZ, 255, 269-70  
 St. Jean de Maurienne, Pact of, 95  
 Salamanca, 308  
 Saleh ed Din Adil Pasha, 79  
 Salonika, 115-16  
 Samuel, Sir Herbert (now Lord), 31-2  
 San Antonio, Cape, 288, 306, 308  
 Sanctions, 86, 131-2, 149, 157, 194-6, 202-3



## INDEX

- San Sebastian, Cape, 254, 264  
 Sante Quaranta, 82  
 Sardinia, 125, 183, 294  
 Savile, Captain Rupert, 258  
 Sawbridge, Captain, 99  
 Scorti, Major, 82  
 Scurfield, Lieutenant-Commander  
     B. G., 276  
 Scutari, 59  
*Searcher*, H.M.S., 146  
*Senator*, H.M.S., 39  
*Seraph*, H.M.S., 39  
 Sèvres, Treaty of, 14  
*Shark*, H.M.S., 39  
*Sheaf Spear*, S.S., 305  
 Sherif Hussein, 204  
*Shropshire*, H.M.S., 109-11, 117,  
     130, 190  
 Shuttleworth, Colonel, 56  
 Sicily, 125, 134, 172, 294, 317, 319  
*Sikh*, H.M.S., 39  
 Simon, Rt. Hon. Sir John, 117, 203  
*Sirdar*, H.M.S., 39  
 Smyrna, 22, 33-6, 43-54, 56-7, 68,  
     75-6, 78, 82, 86, 95  
 Somaliland, 122-4, 152  
*Somersetshire*, S.S., 156  
 Somerville, Rear-Admiral J. F.  
     (later Vice-Admiral), 260, 309  
*Southampton*, H.M.S., 309  
*Sparrowhawk*, H.M.S., 39  
*Spear*, H.M.S., 39  
 Spezia, 147  
*Splendid*, H.M.S., 39  
*Sportive*, H.M.S., 39, 87  
 Strabolgi, Lord, 318  
*Strasbourg*, 123  
 "Stresa Front," 120  
 Storrs, Sir Ronald, 108-9  
 Suda Bay, 109  
 Sudan, 135, 140, 195  
 Suez Canal, 30-1, 87, 107, 125-6,  
     133-6, 139, 141-4, 147, 154, 164,  
     173-4, 177-9, 199, 312, 315, 317,  
     320  
*Sussex*, H.M.S., 156, 213, 216, 224,  
     228  
*Sydney*, H.M.A.S., 156  
*Syria*, S.S., 78  
  
 TAIT, CAPTAIN W. E. C., 190  
 Taranto, 84  
*Taranto*, 164  
 Tarragona, 305  
 Tel Aviv, 206  
  
 Tellini, General, 82  
 Tenerife, 261  
 Tenes, Cape, 264  
*Thorpeshall*, S.S., 270  
 Thrace, 58, 63, 66, 68, 74  
*Thruster*, H.M.S., 162  
*Times*, *The* 85-6, 103, 149, 309, 310  
*Times of Malta*, 218  
*Torrid*, H.M.S., 162  
 Tortosa, Cape, 308  
*Tribune*, H.M.S., 51-2  
 Tricoupis, General, 43  
 Tripoli, 159  
 Tripp, Brigadier W. L. H., 173  
 Tunisia, 120, 122  
 Tuzla Bay, 41-2  
  
 U.18, 283  
  
 VALENCIA, 238-40, 242, 245, 251,  
     259, 265, 306, 308  
*Valiant*, H.M.S., 229  
*Valorous*, H.M.S., 162  
*Vampire*, H.M.S., 101  
*Vega*, H.M.S., 162  
*Velasco*, 261, 293  
*Vendetta*, H.M.S., 101  
*Venetia*, H.M.S., 162  
*Veneria*, 48  
*Veteran*, H.M.S., 63, 103  
*Viceroy*, H.M.S., 162  
*Victoria and Albert*, R.Y., 101  
*Vittorio Veneto*, 123  
  
 WAL-WAL, 81  
*Wanderer*, H.M.S., 103  
 Ware, Petty-Officer H. W., 266  
*Warwick*, H.M.S., 64  
 Washington Naval Treaty, 27, 62,  
     72-3, 104  
 Wauchope, General Sir Arthur, 208  
*Wessex*, H.M.S., 162  
 Wiazemski, Princess, 190  
*Wild Swan*, H.M.S., 103  
 Wilson, Lieutenant-Commander  
     E. R., 266  
*Witherington*, H.M.S., 80  
*Wolsey*, H.M.S., 162  
*Wolverine*, H.M.S., 80  
*Woodford*, S.S., 288, 291, 294  
*Woolwich*, H.M.S., 234  
*Worcester*, H.M.S., 162  
  
 ZAGHLUL, 29, 103  
 Ziwar Pasha, 120



[illegible]

Digitized by Google

DA89

E26



3 2000 009 469 976

1

